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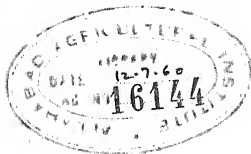
A M A D A M

MAXINE KAUFMAN



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I

A M A D A M

Part One

SPRING INTO SUMMER

W

I

ITH THE sudden total darkness, fear came and froze his limbs; then the lights of the train flickered on and steadied, and he saw that they had merely passed through a tunnel. A conductor came into the car, slamming the steel door behind him and bellowing: "Philadelphia! Philadelphia! This train for Trenton, Newark, and New York. Philadelphia! Coming into Philadelphia!"

Adam turned his head slowly, hoping that the man who was following him did not guess that he could be seen reflected in the glass, and all of his actions supervised. Adam's eyes went from the man's gray Homburg—stupid sort of a hat for a man to wear who wished to remain unobserved, he thought—to the reflection of his own face. He had sat thus before in his twenty-two years, staring at his face in the dark gleam of a train window, admiring the way he looked, the way everyone looked with flaws in shape or color softened by the imperfect light. His face looked dimly back at him, its hawkishness taking on a familiar, attractive patina in the glass. He knew that his hair, which in reflection looked ruffled as though by the wind, was in reality simply uncombed after all the weary

traveling. His skin did not show its sallowness and even his day-old beard appeared merely as a shadow, a shadow which emphasized his cheekbones, giving them a broad, strong look that pleased him because that was the way he wanted to look and to be, bold and strong, in body and in mind.

He glanced back at the Homburg. The man was sitting quietly, pretending to read his newspaper. It was the *Post-Dispatch*, which he had brought on board one stop out of St. Louis. Adam couldn't remember the stop, because the instant the train rolled into the station, he had seen the man standing on the platform, peering steadily from one window to the next as they slowed down. Adam had turned, but not quickly enough, and the man had seen him and had started walking methodically along beside the train until he had reached the steps directly behind Adam's car, and boarded. Adam had wanted to flee at the last second, perhaps even after the train had started, but another glance at the platform had shown him the futility of the plan. For there were others, three others standing there. Two burly men in farm clothing, and a thin-limbed older woman whose eyes had darted away when Adam looked at her. One of the men waved vaguely, pretending he was seeing someone off in the car ahead. But the woman's eyes had leaped back to Adam's face, and he knew, bitterly, why they were really there. Later—later he would find a means of escape. They couldn't have someone waiting for him at every stop in America.

Still, Vicki—Vicki could manage anything, however fantastic, that money, effort, and imagination could accomplish. Sometimes when she and Vince had been broke, he had watched her succeed with only the effort and imagination. Decidedly, it would have been Vicki who had arranged to have him followed, zigzagging across the continent, undeterred by his change at Chicago, his new ticket for St. Louis, and a totally unplanned switch to a train that happened to be loading at a strange platform, and whose destination he himself had not known. From the day Vicki had married his father, such things had happened to them, a hard, bright,

unquenchable spirit had surrounded them, had carried them along, willing or not, in its stream.

He tried to imagine the reactions of the others, while Vicki had—last night or this morning, probably—made the necessary, sharp decisions. The four of them, his two sets of parents, flung together in this emergency as they had never been able to come together for anything more merciful. Vince, his father, with Vicki. Margaret, his mother, and her husband Edmond. Margaret would have swooned and wept alternately in her husband's arms, like a figure out of *Naughty Marietta*. A flicker of compassion went through Adam at this thought of Margaret. Then he thought of Edmond. Edmond, his stepfather, would think in one direction only, eyes stern, mouth pale and tight. "We must bring him back, Margaret. He'll have to face the consequences, even if he is your own son!"

He could picture Vince, his father, tall and shocked, his eyes never leaving Vicki's face.

And Vicki would ignore them all, would say: "Now, listen to me, everyone, this is what we must do. . . ."

His bitter faith in her shut out the thought that someone else might be following him—the police. In any case, the man with the mustache in Chicago, the three farmer-like people at the unknown stop, and the man sitting behind him in the Homburg could not possibly have been conceived by the police, whom Adam knew from various sources to be stupid and unimaginative. Still, he had to be careful, terribly careful. He had to be careful of Edmond. To fall into Edmond's hands now would be fatal.

I am alone, he thought, but it brought a sigh and not the half-expected shudder. For the word "alone" did not conjure up fear, only a rather reassuring image. A slender dark figure—his own—wandering through a maze of corridors whose walls were neither brick nor stone, but a humming white silence that rose around him from one turn to the next, protectively. It did not rouse fear; indeed, he felt a quiet rapture as he walked deeper and deeper into the labyrinth, away from the prying eyes and the hands that would grasp at him.

"Philadelphia!"

The train rocked into the station, lights blurring, faces whirling past, then coming more and more slowly, like a record petering out on the old hand-wound phonograph he and Jeremy used to play with long ago in Vicki's attic. The train crashed to a stop. There was an instant of silence, shattered by a swift mélange of voices and luggage, of feet clanging on metal steps.

Philadelphia. He had never been here. What was it they had? A bell? The Liberty Bell. *The Philadelphia Story*. He had seen it once. How many years ago, in what theater?

From the corner of his eye, he saw the reflected Homburg move, and he tensed. But the man merely stood up to smooth his coat, then sat down again, folding the St. Louis paper on his lap and closing his eyes—pretending to. Adam watched as the Homburg drooped forward.

A group of people moved between them in the aisle.

Now!

With one hand he snatched his suitcase, with the other his raincoat. While the aisle was blocked, he slid out of his seat. Bent over, his chest slammed into the seat in front of his, and he gasped. But he hurried into the throng and turned off at the first platform. Hurry. Wait. Make sure. The man must not see him.

"All abo—oard!"

Adam turned behind a flight of steps and backtracked along the train. This was his car. One of the women in front of him had worn a red hat, one a green. There they were. Two seats farther back and across the aisle would be the man in the Homburg. Adam stared, sweat breaking out on his palms. The man was not there.

The train snorted and Adam ran. He caught the metal steps as they were being raised, tripped, and caught at the handrail. His suitcase hit the inside wall and skittered across the aisle. Someone yanked at his elbow and pulled him up. He picked up his suitcase, muttering thanks, sick at having called such attention to himself. Not that it mattered, now that the Hom-

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burg hat was gone. The man must have followed him off the train. Well, let him enjoy Philadelphia. See the Liberty Bell.

Adam fell wearily into his seat. The red hat bobbed in front of him, then vanished as his lids drooped closed. The woman laughed shrilly at something her companion said, and Adam's eyes snapped open again. In the window he saw the rest of the car reflected. His lips parted, but he made no sound. The man in the gray Homburg sat there, openly staring at him now, in the glass.

II

He got into a cab at Penn Station, and in a trembling voice said: "Just drive. Anywhere. Hurry. Someone is following me."

They shot out into Seventh Avenue. It was past midnight, and raining. A little while ago in Newark, the man in the Homburg—without so much as a glance at Adam—had stepped off the train. But that was a trick. He must have contacted someone else before leaving. It could have been anyone. Any stranger. Each face he had searched seemed to stare secretly back at him. He had studiously avoided their gazes by pinpointing his eyes on a small triangular scar between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. He tried to recall where he had acquired the scar, years and years ago, with the sense that the memory was a clue, something important. It lay like a brand, but of what? He wanted to weep with fatigue.

"Where to?" asked the cabbie.

"Just keep going."

"You want a hotel?"

"I said to keep going."

Mustn't do that. You had to be controlled. Better turn around and see if they were being followed by another cab. He turned and stared into the headlights and wet metal grill of a small truck. That would be clever of them. But the truck turned off, its lights swinging south.

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"Turn here. No, the other way!"

The cab swerved, then righted itself.

"Now look, sonny," the driver said. "I'm not playing no cops and robbers tonight. It's raining, I'll lose too many customers. Tell me where you want to go, or get out."

"Just a few more blocks, and I'll get out," Adam said.

"Continue crosstown?"

"It doesn't matter—yes, all right, crosstown."

They stopped for a red light. Adam stared out the window. Another taxi had pulled up beside them, and he saw a man's profile at the back window. A man alone. Lone men were known to follow people. People whose descriptions were alive in their minds. Age twenty-two, thin, dark, with scar on left hand.

The hand closed convulsively as both cabs started forward, and he held his breath until the other one passed them and turned into Third Avenue. It crossed his mind, foolishly, that he had read somewhere that sentimental New Yorkers were objecting to the demolition of the Third Avenue El.

"Stop," he said. "I'll get out here."

They pulled to the curb.

"That'll be sixty cents, sonny."

Adam handed him a dollar and picked up his coat and bag. He fought with the door handle, then got out and slammed the door behind him.

"Do you want change?" The driver leaned out.

"No. That's all right."

"Listen, sonny, you sure you don't want me to take you to a hotel?"

"No, thanks."

Adam turned into Third Avenue. The rain drove lightly against his face. The street seemed deserted until he glanced into the store windows. Every third or fourth place was a bar, displaying a green or orange neon sign in a dim, rain-beaded window. Behind the windows, mournful-looking shadows sat on stools and gesticulated in silhouette. Adam walked on in the fine rain, feeling the darkness alive about him, peopled with

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unseen men, the men whose shadows drank beer behind the moist plate-glass windows.

He walked on, his head bent a little against the weather.

It struck him all at once that he had no idea where he was going. For several days now—he had lost track of how many—he had been carried in one direction and another on a series of trains. Yet, as though the turning wheels had relieved him of any responsibility, he had not stopped to consider his destination until now. Now when he himself must decide which way to go, he had to stop for a moment. He put his suitcase down on the wet pavement and drew in his breath.

He was in New York. He admitted to himself that this had been a vague part of his plan all along. But why? The bigness of the city, in which a man could so easily lose himself? Or the fact that he had been born here, though he had never been back since the age of six?

Or someone he wanted to see?

Someone. . . .

He pushed a tired hand across his eyes. Then he picked up his suitcase and moved on down the avenue. How many blocks had he come? Six, seven? How many bars had he passed, with their shadows?

He came to an intersection and glanced across the street. There was a food shop on the corner, whitely lighted, startling in contrast to the dim bars. He waited for the traffic light to change, crossed the street, and entered the shop. Two or three men sat at the counter, and a boy in a soiled white cap looked up from the coffee urn.

"Do you have a telephone?" Adam asked.

The boy jerked a thumb toward the back of the shop, and the three men sat crouched over their coffee cups watching Adam walk back toward the phone booth. He put the suitcase down and reached for the Manhattan telephone book.

Someone. A doctor. A doctor named Kiraly.

He opened the book. I, J, K,—his eye ran down the column. Kipp, Kippins, Kiraly.

E. Kiraly, M.D. It was an East Fifty-fifth Street address. He

memorized the phone number, stepped into the booth, and deposited a dime. The phone at the other end rang for a long time.

"Hello?" someone said finally. A woman.

"I want to speak to Dr. Kiraly."

"Who is this calling, please?"

"Is Dr. Kiraly in?" Adam asked.

"This is Dr. Kiraly speaking."

He started to say something and then hung up.

A little blindly, he walked back down the length of the counter and out into the rain. A woman! This was a possibility that had never even occurred to him. A woman doctor. He had not realized until this stupendous disappointment how alone he actually was. Now the solitude held no appeal, held nothing but fear.

Suddenly, two blocks away, he remembered his suitcase. His heart hammering, he turned and ran all the way back to the lunchroom.

There were only two men at the counter now, not three. And his suitcase was gone.

He said to the boy in the white hat: "Do you have change? I—I want to make another phone call."

"Change for a quarter?"

"Yes." His voice was thick and strange.

He took one of the dimes and went back into the booth. He dialed the number again and waited. He felt queer, as though he were going to be ill.

"Dr. Kiraly?" he said, the moment he heard her voice. "I—I must see you. Right away."

"Who is this?" She sounded sharp, but the very sharpness held reassurance. She was real. She was real, and she could grow angry.

"I can't tell you my name now," he said.

"In that case, I must refuse to see you." Her voice was very final. "Please do not phone me again."

"No, wait." Panic flared inside of him. "You have to see me. Please. Please let me come. I'm in New York alone. I've just

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come and someone has stolen my suitcase—everything—everything!”

There was a pause. He gripped the phone, pressing it so tightly that a dull pain spread to his wrist.

“Perhaps the police can help you,” Dr Kiraly said. Her voice was less severe, and he knew the urgency of his plea had reached her. “In any case, though I’d like to help, I can’t see you now. I’m sure you don’t realize it’s one thirty in the morning. Why not call me tomorrow, around ten o’clock?”

Soothing. Like someone talking to a child. Like Vicki.

“No. No, it has to be now.”

“Why?”

Now she was patient, but it would not last. Not like Vicki now, no. Vicki’s patience was infinite. Finally it wore you down. No, this was Margaret, his mother. . . .

“I have to see you.” He knew there was no longer any indulgence, that his period of grace had ended. He knew that he must say it now, to her, with whom it would be safe.

“I must see you now, tonight,” he said. “Because I killed my brother, and only you can help me.”

III

STRANGE SOUNDS pricked at his ears. He turned his face, covering his exposed ear with the crook of his arm. But the noises persisted, poking in at him until he opened his eyes.

He stared up at the white ceiling. There was a faint crack directly above him, just left of the overhead light, which was burning. His eyes followed the crack, lowering toward a dark-green wall. He studied the wall. Something about it displeased him, made for disunity. After a while he saw that the modern dark-green paint clashed with the old-fashioned paneling.

Without moving his head, his eyes explored the rest of the room. There was a window with a Venetian blind that did not quite reach the sill and permitted a streak of outside light

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to come into the room. Over the blind was a curtain of some thin white fabric.

His gaze moved on downward. A bookcase extended the length of the wall. The two shelves were crowded with books.

There was a bright red rug, and a red blanket on his bed.

I do not know where I am. . . .

Sweat broke out on his forehead. He lay motionless, gripped by something that was not precisely fear, but was an acute willing of his mind to rescue him from this new dilemma. He did not remember that this had ever happened to him before. He was sure that he had always known where he was, and who he was.

"I am Adam," he said aloud.

He was Adam, and he had awakened in a strange room. He felt that he was high up somewhere. After a moment he realized there were street noises far below outside the window. Traffic moved, he heard a horn blow, a car horn. A child's piercing cry came thinly to his ears, and a woman's shouted admonition. A sense of great height always made him a little nauseated and he could feel the nausea starting in him.

A breeze ruffled the bottom of the curtain and he drew in a quick breath. He could smell the city. Spring in the city, that smell that was totally different from any other in the world. Spring in any city. Boston? No, Boston was more muted, in sound, in smell, in feel. San Francisco, then? There was a proper salt tinge in the air, but somehow he knew he was not in San Francisco. He was far from there. The trains had taken him away from California. The trains . . .

A shriek of brakes below in the street made him sit up suddenly, forgetting the nausea. A taxi. The rain, he had walked in the rain, bending toward it, carrying his suitcase.

Now he leaped from the bed, trembling, wet with perspiration. Wildly he searched the room, pulling the bed from the wall and opening a strange closet, filled with someone else's clothes.

There was a knock at the door.

He stood in the middle of the room, waiting, breathing

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quickly. In the instant before the door opened, he recalled where he was and knew who would enter.

"Good morning," she said. Her eyes moved to the bed, dragged out from the wall, and noted the open closet door. "Looking for your clothes?"

He felt his face reddening, knowing this for kindness, knowing both of them were aware that his clothes lay folded across the chair in plain sight.

"I was looking for my suitcase," he said, his voice defiant.

"Well, that was taken, you know."

"Yes. I remembered a moment ago. Before you told me." He looked at her closely. "You don't believe me, do you? You think I don't know where I am."

"That's nonsense," she said calmly. "You know where you are and you know who you are. By the way, would you like to tell me your name now? You were overtired last night and you refused to tell me."

"My name is Adam."

"Adam what?"

"Adam—Wenn." But his eyes wavered. "Anyway, that was my name once. It will do, won't it?"

"Yes, if you like." There was no reproach detectable. "You can shower and dress now. Breakfast will be ready for you when you want it. I'm going to my office, which is just down the hall. I have a patient at ten o'clock. I'll be free at noon, possibly a little before." It was a voice used to being respected, and relief rose above his resentment at the realization that someone else had taken over, that he would do as she wished.

"After breakfast you can come back here and read if you like. The housekeeper will tell you when I am ready to see you. Her name is Mrs. Bussie."

"Will that be all?" Adam asked rudely.

"Yes, I think so." She turned to leave, then paused at the door, her fingers on the light-switch. "You don't mind if I turn the lights out now? If you open the blinds it won't be at all dark any more."

"You think I'm afraid of the dark?"

"It's possible, Adam. Sometimes people are."

"Well, I'm not. Go ahead and put the light out."

She pressed the switch and left him, closing the door. Alone again, aimlessly now, he looked across the room. There was a full-length mirror on the inside of the door. By moving a step he was able to see himself in it. He stood abashed. He wore pajama bottoms that were too large for him, with the top button open in the front, showing his navel and a line of black hairs going down his abdomen.

He stood flushed with shame that he should have been caught this way by her, like a child, unaware or perhaps not caring that his trousers were not buttoned. And without question she knew despite his denial that he was afraid of the dark, terrified of it. What had she thought? He fancied suddenly that her eyes had been mocking as she stood there.

He grabbed at his clothing and carried it out to the bathroom. There was an instant of pleasure at remembering where the bathroom was. She had shown him last night. But the thought of her rekindled his shame, and he showered angrily, finding a brush and rubbing his body with it until his skin stung.

He stepped out of the tub and someone called to him from the hallway.

"Dr. Kiraly says if you want to shave, there's a razor in the medicine chest."

He dried himself without replying.

"Did you hear me, you in there?"

"Who wants to know?"

"Mrs. Bussie. The housekeeper." She laughed.

"Well, I heard you."

"That's fine," she said, and went off down the hallway.

He shaved and dressed, putting on his soiled clothes with distaste. As he stepped out of the bathroom, the hallway lay before him, long and somehow formidable. He stood uncertain until a door opened and a dark face peered out at him.

"Breakfast down here."

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The housekeeper watched his approach, smiling, not unkindly.

"Better put the pajamas away."

He carried them over his arm. Abruptly he turned and re-entered the room where he had slept and flung the pajamas on the chair where his clothes had been. By now he hated the sight of them. Ugly pajamas, green and white stripes like a circus tent. At home he slept in white pajamas only, and always wore tops.

At home?

He ate his solitary breakfast, pushing the occasional disturbing thoughts from his mind and concentrating on the food Mrs. Bussie brought him. He wanted to tell her that she was a good cook. The eggs were browned and crisp, the coffee delicious. But he couldn't tell her. He didn't know why. In some vague way he knew that if he admired her, she would be in a position to take advantage of him.

He lingered over his second cup of coffee until she reminded him that she had to clean up.

"You can read in the room where you slept if you like."

"You don't have to give me orders." His face was flushed. "Dr. Kiraly told me before."

She put her brown hands on her hips.

"Listen," she said. "I don't know who you are. Maybe you're the Prince of Wales, but Dr. Kiraly wouldn't stand your being fresh to me. You're nothing but a skinny boy and you better behave yourself around here."

He flung himself from the room. In the bedroom he slammed the door and leaned back against it. His heart beat wildly. Why did he stay? Why didn't he leave? The housekeeper, talking to him that way! She had said she didn't know who he was, but she must know. She must have been told that he was not a guest or she would never have talked that way. A skinny boy!

And *she*. With her mocking eyes, waiting for him to come into her office where she could get her claws into him!

He pressed back against the door. He realized all at once

that the room had been made up. His pajama bottoms were nowhere in sight, and the bed with its red blanket had turned into a bright plaid studio couch. He might never have slept there. Unexpected tears started in his eyes. He did not have to leave. He had already been shut out.

He turned, opened the door, and stepped out into the hallway. He saw Mrs. Bussie coming toward him.

"Doctor will see you." Her voice was cheerful, there was no sign now of displeasure. "Her eleven-o'clock person can't make it till twelve. You come with me."

He followed her, a little dazed by the unexpected proximity of the interview, caught between anxiety and fear. She might have been a jailor leading him into court to hear his sentence. Once he stopped, and she turned and made a beckoning motion. Nodding, he followed her to the door of the office.

"In there," Mrs. Bussie said. She smiled at him, but he turned his face away.

Dr. Kiraly sat behind a desk. Adam closed the door behind him, staring at her, looking for the mockery in her eyes and setting himself to meet it. Her eyes were a calm light gray, almost blank.

"Come and take a chair," she said.

He glanced at the open window. So high. . . .

"Don't you want me to lie down?" He lingered by the door.

"Do you want to?"

He recognized it instantly as a trick question. Shrugging, he forced himself to walk over to the chair at the side of her desk. She would be full of trick questions.

She didn't look at him for a moment, but sat leaning over her desk, marking marks on the edge of a typed letter with her pencil. Doodling.

"You ought to get psychoanalyzed," Adam said with a brief laugh, glancing at the doodles.

"I have been."

He looked at her sharply and seemed to see her for the first time. Last night she had been merely a tall gray-haired woman, with a young face, olive skin, and the unmistakable air of a

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doctor. Even in her robe, of some floor-length silk whose color he did not remember, she had exuded an impersonality that he had found reassuring. Falsely, he thought now. For she was simply another person, as vulnerable as anyone else. She was at best, he reminded himself, involved in one situation that would shake the most stalwart. She was married. Her husband, a heavy-set man with sandy hair, had brought the green and white pajamas to Adam's room last night.

"A qualified psychoanalyst," she said, as though it were a recitation she had made many times before, "has to go through an analysis himself, as a part of his training."

"I see," Adam said coldly.

"Now, about you. You were rather incoherent last night, so we'll start with a clean slate this morning. According to what you told me, you've killed your brother. How did you kill him?"

"I shot him."

"Where?"

"In what part of the country, or in what part of the anatomy?"

"You gave me the geographical location last night, Adam." He hadn't ruffled her.

"You're lying." He barely controlled his voice. "I know what you're doing. You'd like to trick me into telling you where I came from, so you can turn me in."

"You told me you were a student at Berkeley in California until three or four days ago, when you murdered your brother. If I had wanted to turn you in, I would have done so immediately."

"Well, why didn't you? Why don't you now?"

"Is that what you want me to do?"

He gazed back at her and saw that she had an evil face, like the face of a wax dummy that has acquired a well-oiled human brain behind its blankness. A dangerous face.

"Adam," she said, "there may be a number of things that we are not ready to discuss." She hesitated, and that instant of self-doubt made her human to him again, and the evil sub-

sided. "I can only tell you now that I have excellent reasons for not turning you in. Some day you will be prepared to examine my reasons constructively, and you will find them valid. But not just yet."

"You're shielding a murderer!"

"I must insist that we terminate that discussion for now, Adam. Let's understand something. You are not here to defend yourself. You are here to help yourself. If you will co-operate, perhaps there is something we can accomplish together that no one can do alone." Without waiting for his reply she said crisply: "Now. I have a few more questions to ask. The first is, why did you come here?"

He was still hostile, still leaning tensely forward.

"I heard someone mention you. I wouldn't have come if I had known you were a woman."

"Don't you like women?"

"I don't trust them."

"It was a man, then, who mentioned me to you?"

"He never mentioned you directly to me. He was talking to someone else. This boy was saying that—"

"Boy?"

"I said man, not boy," he shot back at her. "Look. Don't try to find out who it was. I won't tell you. Maybe I'll tell you some day if it doesn't matter any more."

"All right."

"Anyway," Adam said, "I don't want to talk about him. I'll tell you whatever you want to know about myself. And I'll pay you, don't worry. I have plenty of money."

"How much money do you have?"

He realized instantly that he had made a mistake. She would not hesitate to overcharge him, if she thought she could get away with it.

"Two hundred dollars." He had nearly four hundred left, out of the sum he had taken from Vicki's drawer.

"Good. Now let's talk about you. Suppose you tell me why you killed your brother."

"I killed him because—" His voice broke off and there was

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a little pool of silence. He turned his eyes slowly to her face and stared at her. Finally, painfully, he said: "I know why I killed him. You needn't think I don't know why. It's just that—sometimes I forget. When I'm tired, like now, I forget. It's only natural, when you're tired."

"Yes, I'm sure it is. But try and maybe it will come to you, Adam."

"It—it's not so simple. It started a long time ago."

"All right." She nodded. "Start a long time ago, then. Start all the way back at the beginning."

"At the beginning?" he said, and a fleeting, weary smile touched his thin face and was gone. "At the beginning, I was born, I guess."

"Where was that?"

"I was born here in New York." Some of the strain went out of his voice now, and his clenched fingers loosened a little. "I was born first."

"First?"

"By five minutes." A questioning look appeared in her eyes. Then: "Oh," he said, "I forgot to tell you, didn't I? Jeremy and I were twins."

IV

THEY HAD named him Adam, first-born.

"I remember when my mother explained it. I think we were about five—no, it must have been close to six, because we'd already spent some time in kindergarten." Adam's eyes moved from Dr. Kiraly's face, to stare at the blank sky outside the window. "Jeremy was jealous. Because his name was—just a name."

Jeremy had run into their bedroom, grieved. They had lived in New York then. The apartment had four rooms. A narrow entrance hall widened into the foyer, where they ate their meals. On one side were the kitchen and living-room. On the other side was the master bedroom. You went through it into

the twins' room. Margaret hated the apartment. She said they lived ungracious lives in it. She wanted a bigger living-room to accommodate a pickled-pine bar. Several of her friends had pickled-pine bars, in newer, more modern apartment houses. Their house was old.

The walls in their house were so thin, Margaret would complain bitterly, that no one had any privacy. That was one thing she had had when she was a girl in Boston, she always added—privacy.

"Anybody who heard you would think it was Back Bay Boston instead of shanty Irish," Vince would snap back.

Then there would be a fight. Adam accepted them philosophically, at six. Everyone had fights. He and Jeremy had them all the time.

Now, as he trotted after Margaret around the dinner table, laying a teaspoon next to each knife, Jeremy's sobs came audibly from the bedroom. Adam listened complacently. He and Jeremy had quarreled earlier in the day, and Adam had lost. Now he felt placated.

From the corner of his eye, he watched his mother's face. Familiar signs appeared. Her mouth tightened, relaxing only when Jeremy stopped crying. Adam laid a spoon at his father's place. He knew Jeremy had paused only for breath, and that in a moment they would hear him crying again. When it came, Margaret dropped a handful of butter knives on the table and hurried to the back bedroom. Their tears always flustered her.

"Now, Jeremy. Jeremy!"

Adam walked around the table and picked up the knives. He placed them across the small plates, the way Margaret did. She would be happy to see that he had set the table, while Jeremy kicked and made a great fuss.

"And Adam has the best bed!" He heard his brother dissolve into fresh tears. "He has the best name and the best bed!"

"Now, darling." Margaret's voice was pleading. "You know that was just an accident. When Mommy and Daddy brought you home from the hospital after you were born, we just happened to put you in the bed by our room, and Adam in the bed

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by the window. Don't you like sleeping next to Mommy and Daddy? I bet Adam wishes he could sleep next to—"

"He does not! He has the best bed!"

"Sshhh. Now, listen. We'll ask him again, shall we? Maybe he'll change beds with you. Adam isn't a selfish little boy. Adam!" she called.

"Adam, look darling." He saw his brother sprawled across her lap, watching him with wet, accusing eyes. "Jeremy feels it's only fair to change beds. After all, darling, you've been next to the window since you were born. That's almost six whole years, isn't it? While poor Jeremy—"

"Jeremy is bad."

"I am not!" Jeremy shrilled. Tears, which did not intimidate Adam, who knew they could be turned on and off at a moment's notice, streamed down Jeremy's face. "I am not bad! Adam is bad! Adam is selfish, selfish, selfish—"

"Hey, what's going on in here?"

Adam turned quickly and ran to fling his arms about his father's legs.

"Oh, my God," said Margaret. She held her fingers over her ears, spread them whitely across the short dark hair. "Vince, it's the beds again. I can't stand it. All day long they fight and screech, and then when evening comes and I've told them a million stories to shut them up, all I want is a moment's peace to fix dinner, but do I get it? No! It just starts all over again. You've got to do something with these kids!"

"What would you suggest? Drowning them?"

They all stared at him.

"What's the matter, Vince?" Margaret asked after a moment.

Adam tilted his head back, still holding on to his father's knees, watching his face.

"Nothing's the matter. Look, Adam, I'm tired. What are you trying to do, drag me down to the floor?"

Adam backed away, blinking.

"Vince!" said Margaret.

"Oh, Jesus Christ, I'm sorry. It has nothing to do with you kids, so stop looking at me like that." He glanced from one to

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the other of his sons and sighed. "Now what was this big fight about when I walked in?"

He took his hat off and sent it sailing through the air to the dresser. He rolled up his shirtsleeves with a great flourish to make them laugh, and headed for the bathroom. The twins followed him, both trying to talk at once, with Margaret behind them. Her eyes were dark with apprehension.

Vince washed, bending over the basin to slosh water on his face, then groping for a towel.

His sons quieted down when he reached for his hairbrush. He was so tall he had to bend to see the top of his head in the mirror. Their father's height, the grasshopper bending of the knees at the mirror, never failed to impress them. They looked on with pride as he drew the brush across his blond hair.

He put the brush back and met Margaret's eyes briefly over their heads.

"So?" He touched Adam's hair lightly with his hand. "What's the story?"

"Jeremy wants to sleep in my bed."

"I do not! I want to sleep near the window, but I want it to be *my* bed!"

They filed noisily back to the foyer. Margaret hurried past the table into the kitchen, never even noticing that Adam had laid out the butter knives.

"Dinner's ready. Everybody sit down."

"Daddy," Adam said, "tell Jeremy he can't sleep in my bed."

They watched him, two pairs of eyes bright with anticipation. He glanced from one to the other of his sons. Except for Adam's darker coloring, they looked very much alike.

"Tell Jeremy, Daddy."

"I'm afraid it isn't quite that simple, Adam. This fight has been going on a little too long. Now we'll have to settle it once and for all. Each of you can sleep in the bed by the window for one month at a time. A month is thirty days. Then we'll change. How's that?"

Adam felt his teeth clamp down, hard.

"No! It's not fair!" cried Jeremy. Tears were already stand-

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ing in his eyes. "Adam had the bed for six whole years. He's selfish! Mommy said!"

"That'll be enough of that," Vince cut in. "You asked me to settle it and I did. Now that's the end of it!"

Margaret, coming from the kitchen with a platter of food, stopped in the doorway. After a moment she continued to the table, her lids lowered. She started to serve them. No one spoke. Adam looked down at his food with hard eyes. He wouldn't eat it. He wouldn't touch it. They had no right to give his bed away, even for one night. It was his.

"Eat your dinner, darling," Margaret said.

He sat unmoving.

"Oh, come on," she said.

But he did not touch his food, and when she cleared the table, she took his plate with the others, making no comment. Jeremy, who had eaten his dinner, looked blandly across at him.

"Daddy?"

"Yes, Adam?"

"When will Jeremy's month start?"

"What?"

"Jeremy's month. In my bed."

"His—oh. Let's see." Vince was pretending to speak in his ordinary voice, but the twins glanced at each other across the table, even now momentarily united in their secret knowledge of adults. "The first of May begins next week. Will that do?"

Both of them nodded, watching each other guardedly.

Margaret came in with chocolate pudding for dessert. For a few minutes Adam sat there without touching it, then picked up his spoon and started to eat. Next week was far off, too far off to have any real meaning to him. Too far off to give up chocolate pudding.

At eight o'clock they were bathed, brushed, and tucked into bed. It was dark in the room. A few months before, when they had started kindergarten, they had agreed that school-age boys did not need a night-light.

Jeremy started to mutter to himself. He did this every night. "And then the bears came." He was silent for a moment. "Listen, nobody could've caught that ball. That's a red ball. That ball has blue and yellow stars all over it."

Adam watched the stars on the turning ball.

"Dicker sticker." Jeremy usually reverted to baby talk when he grew drowsy. "Mouse ran up a clock. Cut off a tail with a carver knife."

"That isn't how you say it."

Jeremy fell silent.

Their parents' voices crept into the room, and Adam sat up in his bed.

"They're talking about us."

"If you get out of bed I'll tell," said Jeremy.

"You shut up." Adam got out of his bed, crossed the room, and opened the French doors a few inches.

"No, I don't," his mother was saying. "I think it could have very bad results psychologically." Now he was sure they were discussing Jeremy and himself. They always used that word in such a discussion.

"Jesus, you told me to settle it, and I did," his father said, in the new tense voice. "Anyway, I'm not going to stand here and discuss kids' beds all night, Margaret. There's something else to discuss."

A long pause.

"What is it, Vince?" Margaret asked, lightly.

"Mommy's scared," whispered Jeremy. Adam knew that Jeremy was sitting up now, listening with him.

"I think we'd better discuss Jack, Margaret."

"Jack? Jack who?"

"Jack Butler."

"Are you joking?"

"No. I'm not kidding. Look, don't lie to me, Margaret. You've lied to me too many times."

"How dare you—"

"Oh, God, you aren't going to start that again? For once in your life, why don't you just face up to it? Do you have to

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scream and curse me out every time, before you have the guts to admit it? Can't you spare me the hysterics just this once? You ought to know by now I won't do anything about it!"

"Because there's nothing to do anything about! Here I am sitting around making ends meet on your lousy salary! With hardly a decent dress to my name! And you come home and accuse me—"

"Vincent Henlein, the failure! Can't even keep his wife in rags! Great way to change the subject, hey, Margaret?" He made a queer sound, between a laugh and a snort. "Okay, I'll let you change it. You're always yapping about what people think of us. Other people! How we dress, how we live! Well, what about how we *are*? My wife, my little helper! You hit pretty low this time, didn't you? A guy from my office. Jesus! Well, Friday I'll be out of there. I'll be out of a job. I have no choice."

"Daddy is getting a new job," Jeremy whispered.

"Shhhh."

"Vince"—Margaret's voice shook—"Vince, listen, it wasn't anything. I swear it wasn't. We had a few drinks, nothing else. When would I have time? With the kids around?"

"How the hell do I know? They're in kindergarten every morning. Maybe I get out of my bed at nine, and lady-killer Butler gets into it at ten!"

"That's a lie!" Margaret cried. "He never told you that. He's a gentleman, even if you aren't!"

"He didn't have to tell me. Somebody else did. And lower your voice, for Christ's sake. You want your own kids to know you're a lush and a whore?"

There was a brief silence, then something toppled over with a crash. Instinctively, Adam ducked back to fling himself across his bed.

"Get up, damn you!" his father yelled. For a second Adam had the sick feeling that his father was shouting at him. Then Vince shouted: "Get up off that floor, you hear me? You've pulled your last phony faint on me! Now get up, damn you!" There was a scuffling sound, then it was quiet. Finally Vince's

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voice came again, changed, uncertain. "Margaret? Margaret! I —oh, Christ, Margaret, honey. Listen, I didn't mean it. We'll get out of here. I'll take that job, that civil-service job upstate. Remember? It only pays a hundred and fifty a month, but it'll give us a chance to start over. And you'll be different. We'll start over, you hear me, honey? Listen—"

"Adam," Jeremy whispered, his voice choked.

"What?"

"What's a—a whore?"

"I don't know. And you better not cry, or you'll get it." He got out of bed and closed the French doors tightly, shutting out the last faint bit of light, and the sound of his father's pleading voice, which somehow hurt him. In the pitch-darkness, he climbed back to his bed.

"I don't understand about all that," quavered Jeremy.

"I don't either. We'll have to be big; then we'll understand it."

"Big?"

"Yes."

"How big?"

"Twenty-one, I think," said Adam.

Twenty-one had been last year. Now he was twenty-two and he understood, and turned despairing eyes to Dr. Kiraly's face. For a moment he watched her, then he dropped his head into his hands, and wept.

V

SHE WAITED until he was quiet. His handkerchief was soiled and he turned away from her while he used it. Finally he said: "I don't know why that happened. I don't think I've cried since I was in kindergarten."

"I didn't think you had."

"Jeremy was the crybaby in the family, not me." He glanced

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at her now. "I suppose you think I'm tearing him down in order to justify myself."

"Are you?" she asked.

"Of course not," he said, anger starting in him.

"Good." She looked at her wristwatch. "Our time is just about up for today. There are a few things we'd better settle before you leave, though. One is my fee. I charge fifteen dollars a visit, but since I want to see you every day, at least for the present, I realize that would be pretty steep. We'll make it half—seven fifty."

"That's okay," he said, but he could feel the anger again. It seemed like an exorbitant fee.

"I'll want your address, Adam, so as soon as you find a room you can phone me here."

He looked at her, startled. He had not really considered the problem of finding a place to stay, at least not in the immediate sense she now thrust upon him.

"After that," she said, "I suppose you'll want to find a job."

"I have to put off finding a job for a while."

"Why is that?"

"Until they stop looking for me."

"Who's they?"

"My family."

"You seem rather unconcerned that someone else might be looking for you," she remarked. "The police. After all, by now I can't possibly be the only one who knows what happened."

"You don't know Vicki. When you understand about Vicki," he said, "you'll see why I'm not afraid of the police. She'd never let them find out."

"I see. Do you suppose that's why nothing has appeared in the newspapers? After all, it ought to make headlines when one brother kills another. Especially a twin."

"I just told you. Vicki wouldn't let anyone find out."

"Still, there's a body to get rid of, isn't there?"

It seemed to him that she watched him closely now, and for no reason at all. He had answered all of her stupid questions, hadn't he? Then why did she watch him this way, as though

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she were waiting for something he did not have to give? She was a difficult, baffling woman. He stared back at her. She was suddenly a total stranger and he could not even pinpoint the reason for her presence.

"What did you say?" His voice was confused, seemed to come from far off, like the echo of something he might have said before, a long time ago.

"It wasn't important, Adam." Now she got to her feet behind the desk and he rose automatically. "Will you be here tomorrow at eleven, then? In fact, we'll make it every day at eleven, shall we?"

"Every day?" He still faltered. "Up here?"

"Oh? Do you find this height uncomfortable, Adam?"

"I just don't like high places. It's not that I'm afraid."

"Well, perhaps this will help you get used to it."

"I lived on the third floor and it never bothered me."

"Good. Of course that isn't very high, is it?"

"It's high enough." He turned and went toward the door, opened it.

"You'll call me today when you find a place to live?"

"I told you I would. You don't happen to know of anything? Offhand? A room somewhere?"

"No."

He closed the door behind him. She had not wanted to help him find a place to live. Her voice had clearly reminded him that she was a doctor, not a rental agent. He knew she disliked him.

Somewhere in the house, behind the walls, a bell rang. Mrs. Bussie appeared, coming from the back of the apartment, coming serenely down the narrow carpet.

She saw Adam and said: "Just a minute till I open the door."

She admitted a man of about forty.

"Morning, doctor," she said.

"How are you, Mrs. Bussie?" He wore rimless glasses that twinkled. "Glad spring is here?"

"Indeed I am. Doctor's waiting for you."

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"You never let me waste any of my expensive minutes on small talk, do you?" He saw Adam and smiled, then went into the office.

Mrs. Bussie was holding the front door open, waiting.

"I thought you said another patient was coming at twelve," Adam said.

"You just saw him, didn't you?"

"That was a doctor. I heard you say so. And I saw the way he looked at me. She called him, didn't she?" He felt himself getting excited, in a way that disturbed him because he knew that unless something stopped him, he would go on saying things, saying things that perhaps he shouldn't. "She called, and they're in there right now, talking about me, deciding what to do. Whether or not to call in the—"

"Now you stop that!"

He closed his eyes for a moment. He had almost said it, the thing he must say to no one. And Mrs. Bussie had stepped in to save him just in time. Another second, another word, and it would have been too late ever to go back.

"Listen to me, boy. That man was a doctor, true. But doctors have got their troubles, just like other people." He looked at her mutely. "You better go along now. I got to dress and go out myself and do my shopping. Now you just try and stop thinking the whole world revolves around nobody but you. Maybe that'd help."

He couldn't seem to make himself take a step in the direction of the doorway. Beyond it, the outside corridor loomed like a dark, yawning hole. He stood there, feeling his fists clench.

Curious now, Mrs. Bussie said: "What on earth's wrong with you, boy?"

"I—" He stopped, then said in a low, quick voice: "I'm supposed to ask you about finding a room. Dr. Kiraly said you might know of something. Something that isn't too much money. Do you?"

She regarded him steadily.

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"Doctor never told you to ask me that."

"She did! She said she didn't have time, she was expecting someone—"

"You talk that loud, and she'll come out and settle your hash." She looked at his anxious face, then shook her head. "I'd like to, but I better not. You go along now."

Without speaking again, he gave her a thin, indrawn smile and went toward the door. As he stepped into the darkness beyond the doorway, he had a sensation of falling. Instinctively, his hands came up and struck out at the air. He heard the door close. The hallway was a small, dim space, blocked in concrete, walling him in. This was another of the secret fears, a morbid horror of closed spaces. He knew the fear was senseless, as he knew his anxieties about darkness and about high places were senseless. Yet each time he was confronted with such a situation, his heart would hammer to bursting, sweat would break over him, a weakness like the threat of death itself, would attack his limbs. A vague but terrible feeling of doom and disaster would engulf him.

Now he stood with his forehead pressed against the wall, his spread fingers flattened against the concrete blocks on either side of his head. He pushed like a man using all his strength to move a stalled car on a busy highway, while behind him voices shouted angrily, and horns honked. He pushed, trembling, until the wall grew moist under his palms. With one part of his mind he saw himself foolishly pressing against a blank wall, while with the other part he knew desperately that he must push still harder. He groaned, his eyes shut tightly.

Mrs. Bussie, coming out with her shopping basket, found him still pitting himself against the wall.

"Here," she said. Concern lay across her face. "You going to be sick? Better come inside. Come on. Into the kitchen."

She led him through the inside hallway, past the closed office door, and through the dining-room, where he had had his breakfast. In the kitchen she put down her sweater and shopping basket and pushed Adam into a chair.

"Put your head down on the table a minute."

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"I'm all right. I'm not sick."

"Just scared?"

He looked at her and started to deny it, but stopped himself in time and nodded.

"That's right. That's what it was. I was scared."

"Scared to look for a room?" she asked, puzzled.

"Yes." Roused from his bad dream now, he pushed it from his thoughts and watched Mrs. Bussie's face craftily. "If you don't help me, I don't know what I'll do."

She sighed.

"You don't have to work on me any more. I'll see what I can manage." She started to laugh. "Of course, you'll have to tell the doctor I helped, and then she'll be mad at me."

"I won't tell."

"Oh, yes you will. But no matter." She picked up her shopping basket and found her purse inside of it. Frowning to herself, she thumbed through a small address book. "A friend of mine is a superintendent in a big apartment house, and there's lots of rooming houses on his street. Maybe he'll know of something."

She walked across the kitchen to the telephone. "Now you sit there a minute. Don't start walking up and down like a cat. It makes me nervous."

He sat on the edge of the chair, clasping his fingers, opening them, clasping them again.

"John?" she was saying. "John, this is Mary Bussie. I have a nice boy here looking for a place to live. Just about the age of the boy you got in college. Now, how about your street?" She listened for a minute, nodded, and turned to Adam.

"How much do you want to pay?"

He looked at her blankly, and after a pause she turned back to the telephone.

"He'll pay nine, ten dollars a week."

Adam stared at the back of her head, clasping his fingers tightly.

"All right, then," Mrs. Bussie said, "I'll send him down. Give him a couple of hours. He needs to buy himself a clean

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shirt. And stop someplace and get his clothes pressed. He'll see you around two thirty."

As she hung up, Adam felt a familiar smile twist lightly across his lips. It was easy when you knew how to fool people. Everything was so easy!

It was a third-floor room in the rear of a brownstone house. It was not high enough to cause him any anxiety. He had lived on the third floor for a long time.

"It's twelve a week," the landlady said. She was a thin, middle-aged woman with a red neck and an unpleasant body odor. On first sight, she had reminded him of the woman standing with the two farmers on the station outside of St. Louis, the people who had been following him. But some quick instinct told him that this woman had not been outside of New York City, off this street even, in years. She was too much a part of its gray pavements and dull brown houses and air of faint crumbling. . . .

Now he said to her: "Twelve a week? I thought it would be ten, at the most."

"Well—" She stopped as though she were considering a life-and-death matter, then said: "You can have it for ten, because John recommended you, and I'd rather have somebody reliable than the money. I know John wouldn't send me anybody unreliable. He's a hard worker and he's even got a son that goes to college. Been in that apartment house for ten years. Everybody knows him." She glanced at Adam's freshly sponged suit and new shirt, and laughed in a flustered way. "Of course, I could tell by looking at you, you'd be a nice young man. I didn't mean to say I rented you the room just because a colored man sent you."

Adam thought fleetingly of Mrs. Bussie, of her kindly dignity, something this woman would never possess.

"Do you want your rent in advance?" His voice was cold.

She stepped back, startled.

"Why—yes." Her pale-blue eyes revolted him. He reached into his wallet and took out a ten-dollar bill. Vicki's money.

He laid the bill on the edge of the dresser. "Why—thank you." She snatched it up and hurriedly slipped it into her pocket, as though engaged in some sort of illegal transaction. "You've got a nice room here, with a sink and all. You'll find towels—"

"I can see them."

When she had gone, he inspected the room. It was long and narrow, obviously the remodeled half of what had once been a decent-sized room. There was a bird's-eye maple dresser to which he took an instant dislike. Glass knobs marched down the front of it, and it seemed to dominate the room, leaning forward in a predatory way toward the faded green bedspread and rather helpless-looking armchair. He walked to the window and looked out at the back of another house that was a facsimile of this one. In the alley dozed a row of listless-looking ashcans.

Adam's hand jingled some change in his pocket, which reminded him that he must telephone Dr. Kiraly.

He took his key from the dresser, locked his door, and went downstairs. There was an open telephone attached to the wall on the first floor. But he knew too well how people loved to listen and spy.

Out on the sidewalk, he glanced up and saw his landlady holding aside a curtain to watch him. *You see?* She smiled, her teeth as bright as china and sharp as a dog's. Adam ducked his head and went quickly down the street. A few blocks away he found a drugstore.

"I found a room," he said to Dr. Kiraly.

"Good."

"You wanted the address." He gave it to her, then added: "You didn't think I'd find a place so easily, did you?"

"You've done very well, Adam."

"I knew you didn't want to help me. I suppose you were trying to test my resourcefulness or something."

"You might put it that way."

"Well, I'm afraid you didn't succeed." His voice was full of triumph, with a tinge of spite. "You'll have to find someone else, if you're looking for a guinea pig. I didn't feel like run-

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ing around looking for a place, so Mrs. Bussie got one for me. I told her you said she should."

"I understand from Mrs. Bussie," Dr. Kiraly said evenly, "that it did not happen quite as simply as that. But I must say good-by now, Adam. Be here tomorrow morning at eleven, please."

"Good-by," he said.

He walked very slowly back toward the rooming house. A frown drew his brows together, and his gaze trailed along the curb. What had Mrs. Bussie said? That he had lied, that he had taken advantage of her? Worse, that he had been sick outside the front door?

He passed beneath a naked-looking city tree and viciously reached up to snap off a twig. Mrs. Bussie, like everyone else, had betrayed him. Like everyone else during his entire life. By now he should expect it, knowing they were all corrupted by this taint of betrayal. That was the thing that was really wrong with his life—their betrayal—and nothing could change it. Why had he come to Dr. Kiraly at all?

He became suddenly aware of a man's eye staring into his face, and his heart jumped with fright. Someone new following him! Then he realized he had bumped into the man, and muttered something, while his fear bounced downward and subsided. He mounted the brownstone steps, aware that he had been angry about something a few minutes before, and unable to recall the reason for his anger. Oh yes—Dr. Kiraly! What was it she had done?

Still frowning, he opened the door and stepped into the vestibule. There was an inside door which he opened with his key. In the hallway it was darker, and cooler. Dr. Kiraly. Why had he come? Why did he need her? All at once the importance of the entire relationship with her seemed to waver, then crumble before his eyes. A sense of freedom rushed through him, and he wanted to cry out. But he stood there spellbound on the first step. He was free! He did not need her. He would not go back.

He became aware of quick, light steps above his head. A pair

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of legs came down past the shafts of the second-floor balustrade, smooth, slim, light-skinned. At the calves were carelessly turned-up rolls of blue denim. The dungarees came dancing down toward him, feet in worn brown moccasins. They stopped suddenly, stood hesitant. Adam's eyes moved upward. He saw at a glance that she was young. A second later she started down again, her hand on the railing and her face moving out into the light.

Adam stared at her, growing rigid.

"You!" he cried.

Startled, she paused. Her eyes were dark—no, she moved, and they were green, perhaps blue.

"Vicki," he said hoarsely. "I'm sorry. Of course I don't mean Vicki. I mean—"

Sweat poured over him now. His tongue seemed to thicken in his mouth and he stood paralyzed and voiceless.

The girl in the blue jeans stared back at him. He found his breath again and stumbled past her up the stairs. Without looking back he hurried up to the third floor. He thrust his key into the lock, but it would not turn. He glanced up. His room was number nine. This was seven.

"Sorry. Sorry," he mumbled. His shirt stuck to him as he hurried to his own door and opened it. The light was on, as he had left it. He sank down at the edge of the bed.

The girl. Who was she? Who had she been? Someone important to him, this he knew. Somewhere in the dark spiral of his life she had emerged, and grown enmeshed in the tangle, but where?

VI

"I REALIZE NOW," he said to Dr. Kiraly, "that I never saw her before."

He stared out of the office window. The sky was less blank today, with small puffs of cloud sailing slowly past. "I can't

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explain what happened when she came down the stairs. It was like—like all the women in my life coming toward me, all in one. She was Margaret's size, but darker than Margaret. As dark as Allegra. I haven't told you about Allegra yet. But I was in love with her. In college." He paused, his eyes troubled. "The strangest thing about this girl yesterday was that she could look like Margaret or Allegra—and make me think of Vicki."

"Why is that so strange?"

"Vicki is a big blonde."

"Perhaps she dressed the way Vicki might dress."

"I don't know. It was—I wonder if it was the way she came down the stairs. I saw Vicki coming down the stairs toward me, that first day. The first time Jeremy and I saw her. That was after we moved to California."

He clearly remembered their move to California. Vince had been offered a transfer when he had gone in to quit his job. They wanted him to open a branch office on the west coast.

"It'll be rough," he told Margaret. "We'll be up against all the established companies. Still, we've made a go of it here in the East, so why not? Times are bad, but there's nothing like giving people more insurance per dollar."

"You'll make it work, Vince," Margaret said. "You're a born salesman, and people are always crazy about you. That's the most important thing in this sort of work. Adam, finish that salad, or you won't get any dessert."

"What's the dessert?"

"Lemon meringue pie."

Vince looked up with quick pleasure.

"Did you make it?"

She nodded. She was an excellent cook, but her efforts were too sporadic to give her a reputation with her family. During the last few days, however, every meal had been a triumph.

"The pie is to celebrate Daddy's new job," she said now, watching Vince with a smile. "And mine."

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"You're going to have a job?" Jeremy demanded.

"Mommy means all the packing and stuff to get us to California." Vince grinned back at Margaret across the table.

"That isn't what she meant," Adam put in, glancing from one to the other. "It's a secret, isn't it?"

His mother laughed. "That's right, darling, it is."

Now she brought out the dessert.

"Look at this meringue. It's a mile high. I made it the way Grandma makes it. Oh, Vince, that reminds me. Mamma phoned from Boston this morning. We can't leave without taking the kids up there to say good-by."

"Sorry, honey, you'll have to take care of that by yourself. I have to be in L.A. by the 14th."

A week later Vince left for California, and Margaret drove the twins up to Boston. Adam remembered the house, particularly a doorway at the side entrance, a narrow brown doorway that led downstairs to the old-fashioned kitchen and dining-room. When you stood in front of it, you could imagine wonderful things. It was the doorway to Alice in Wonderland's house, or the doorway to Peter Rabbit's underground home. Or the doorway to a gang of robbers' den, if the mood struck him, and he was a cop with a gun, he was a sheriff with two guns. . . .

His Aunt Rose hugged him and he smelled raisins and fresh bread in the deep white folds of her apron. And his grandfather took them, one twin holding each hand, to the corner bar and grill, where they stood outside and waited for him to appear with a pail brimming with beer. He showed them to his cronies, nice old men whose roughened hands tousled their hair and offered them pennies.

Boston lay behind them and they went back to New York, where Margaret put things into cartons and took them out again, totally unable to decide what must go with them and what must be left behind.

At last they were ready to set out. Margaret wired Vince that they were coming, and they climbed back into the car

the company had given Vince. Behind them, rambling gaily along, was a small open trailer filled with their possessions and covered by a tarpaulin.

Adam felt no real grief at leaving, only a queer sense of unreality. He knew that at any moment Margaret would turn the car around and they would go back and resume their old lives again. A man and woman and a little girl had knocked at the door a few days ago, and during their visit the little girl had said: "My name is Gail Singer and I'm going to come live in this house." But he knew they would not really move into the apartment, and the little girl would not really sleep in his room.

Then he and Jeremy had a new room, in the new house in California, and it was almost as if the other house had never existed. The new house was a small stucco bungalow with a lemon tree in the garden. All the houses on the street were alike, except for the color. Theirs was green, the only green one.

"It's very cute," said Margaret. "Except for the furniture, of course. Little by little, we'll get rid of a few pieces and put in some modern things. It will make a big difference."

"I sort of like it this way." Vince looked around the faintly shabby living-room. "That green chair is the most comfortable thing I ever sat in."

"Oh, Vince, for heaven's sake, footstools went out with General Lee." She gave the green chair and stool a disdainful glance. "If you want something for your feet, how about a white leatherette hassock. It's good for an extra seat, too, when we have company. Darling, after all, we'll be entertaining customers, clients of yours. A good impression will be good for business."

Vince laughed.

"That's one way of getting a white hassock out of me."

"Well, these things are important. And, Vince—what about a bar? Right along the end wall?"

"I don't think that's such a good idea, honey."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I think it'll be better not to have any liquor around the house."

Her face flamed suddenly.

"You don't have to act as if I'm an alcoholic," she said in a sharp voice. "Sure, I've taken a few drinks once in a while—"

"I'll say you have."

"What are you getting at, Vince? You know I never drink unless I want to, never because I have to!"

"Margaret, let's not start that argument again. I don't want a bar in the first place. Once you have it, you're stuck with it. And with a lot of hangers-on who start coming around and expecting their special brand. We can't afford it."

"Then you should have said that in the first place," she replied angrily. "You made it quite obvious that you don't trust me."

"Honey, why should I trust you?"

"Because I gave you my word of honor!" she cried. "That's why!" He started to interrupt and she cut him short. "And don't tell me to lower my voice. I don't care if the kids do hear me! I don't care if everybody on the block hears me! That's another rotten little habit you have, provoking me to yell my head off, then standing there with that pained look on your face! All right, I'm loud, I'm vulgar!" She burst into tears and ran from the room.

"Jesus," Vince said. "Jesus Christ Almighty."

Margaret had once read them the story of Pandora, and now it seemed to Adam that the little stucco house had become a Pandora's box with some unknown things smoldering in it, waiting for the lid to be lifted. The walls echoed with anger, night after night. Accusing voices became a single discordant blare, mixing with the scent of the lemon tree that came into their room at night. A taunting mélange, bitter-sweet.

"I don't like this house," Jeremy wept, and Adam pressed against his pillow and stared into the darkness, listening, listening.

Then slowly the anger seemed to subside. Margaret laughed

at Vince across the breakfast table one morning, and that night when he came home he tossed his sons high into the air, the way he used to. On Sunday a next-door neighbor helped them put a swing in the back yard. The patio, Margaret called it. Other neighbors began to drop in evenings, and pleasant sounds floated into the bedroom.

Jeremy accepted the new harmony with relief, but Adam waited silently, mistrust putting forth its strange twisted shoot inside of him. He played in the next-door sandbox and swung on the swing with Jeremy, and sometimes the two of them dropped their shoes on the front steps and went padding bare-foot down the California street. And all the while he was waiting, withdrawn, while time slid by. At last his waiting came to an end. The angry voices rushed back, the happy breakfasts were over. The swing broke and no one fixed it.

"Margaret," Vince said, "I can't take much more of this. I'm having a tough enough time working things out at the office without coming home to a new battle every night."

"It isn't a new battle, it's the same old one! The battle to save Margaret's soul. Vince Henlein's one-man crusade." She laughed bitterly. "The way you crowd me on that straight and narrow path, the Virgin Mary herself would topple off."

"I don't want to crowd you," he said, "but what choice do you give me? There are a dozen decent women living on this block, and you pick Cheryl Dobbs to hang out with."

"There's nothing wrong with Cheryl. Just because she's a smart dresser and knows how to use make-up, the rest of the old hens are jealous of her. I know what it's like. I went through that mill myself, back in Boston."

"Oh? I was under the impression that it all started because I couldn't buy you decent clothes and pickled-pine bars and diamond rings. You mean it started before that? This is interesting. I was given to believe you came to me pure."

"Oh, how I love your snide, rotten remarks!"

"How did you expect me to take it? Cheryl and her afternoon beer parties with the postman." Vince laughed twistedly. "I hear you're in on those, too. Does he bring a friend?"

"You damn snoop," Margaret breathed. "Are you sure those are insurance papers you carry around in your briefcase? Or do you ring doorbells and collect information about your wife? I love the way somebody always tells you—or you just happen to hear! Especially when it's all lies—gossip! It wouldn't occur to you to ask around? Or would it?"

"I never spied on you, and you know it. I've never had to. For Christ's sake, do you think when a man's married to a god-dam nymphomaniac he has to go out and check with the neighbors? You started screwing around the week after we were married!"

"It was your idea to make a little housewife out of me," Margaret shrilled. "Who wouldn't have been bored? I wanted to keep busy, go on working!"

"What's the difference if it's a stockbroker or a milkman?" Vince asked wearily. "It's a sickness with you. That's why I've hung on, and you know it. I wanted you to go to a doctor and treat it, like any other kind of sickness."

"That's why he hung on, he says!" Margaret broke into wild, angry laughter. "That's why he hung on! Not because he never had the guts to walk out, oh, no! Because I was sick, he felt sorry for me! Did you ever hear anything so funny?"

While she laughed, Adam covered his face with his arms and tried, fitfully, to sleep.

Now there were the brief, uncertain periods that Adam thought of as the light times and the dark times. They came and went quickly, fragile as eggshells. They could last a day or a week, or sometimes a minute.

Then one morning, after a bitter night, Vince was not with them for breakfast. Margaret explained to the twins that he would be away for a while on a business trip.

"Will he come back soon?" Jeremy asked.

"Sooner or later." A smile twisted lightly across Margaret's mouth.

Adam looked at her across the rim of his glass.

"Mommy?"

"Yes, darling?"

"Did Daddy go away because you were mad at him last night?"

His mother's eyes, quick and brown as his own, seemed to darken. Then in the overbright, adult voice they knew so well, she asked: "Why, what ever made you think I was mad at Daddy? Now drink your milk and go outside and play."

Vince came back one night after they were in bed. Adam had dozed, but he was awakened by a rapping on the screen door. Margaret's high heels tripped across the kitchen and through the living-room.

"Hello, Margaret," he heard his father say.

"Hello, Vince."

Adam wanted to hurry to meet his father, but something in Margaret's voice held him back.

"Long time no see," she said.

"Can't I come in?"

She unlocked the door with a click.

"Sure, you can come in."

They went into the living-room.

"How are the kids?" Vince asked. "I tried to call a couple of afternoons, but nobody ever answered. I didn't want to wake them up at night."

"Cheryl and I take them to the beach most afternoons."

There was a silence.

"Jeremy," Adam whispered.

No answer.

"You managed to stay away a whole week, Vince." The bright, high voice now. "That's a record, isn't it, for you?"

"Yes." Vince sounded as if he were trembling. "Yes, I guess it's a record, Margaret. One I—I never want to beat."

"I'm sure you never will." She laughed flatly.

"Don't," Vince said. "Please don't, Margaret. Just come here to me. Margaret . . ."

There was a long, deep silence. Then with a sigh Adam lay back and closed his eyes.

But even after that the dark times came back. And when they did, they no longer bore the frail, temporary air of the

past. Now it hung over them. Every word, every move, was filled with tension. Then one night it was over, everything in their lives was over.

"I'm going to the movies with Cheryl tonight, Vince. Put the kids to bed, will you? They can go without baths."

"Oh? What are you going to see?"

Vince sat in the armchair in the living-room with his newspaper, while Adam and Jeremy ran toy trains over the rug.

"What do you mean, what am I going to see?"

"Obviously, I mean what picture."

"Is this supposed to indicate you don't believe I'm going to the movies?" Margaret's voice rose.

"I didn't say that."

"You did. You said as much."

"Maybe your guilty conscience said it."

Margaret turned with a jerk of her shoulders and walked out of the room. Vince followed her. Their voices rang back from the bedroom.

"If you want to go to the movies, for Christ's sake, can't you find somebody else to go with?" Vince asked furiously. "Why Cheryl? You don't have to answer that, I'll tell you why. So you can show how little respect you have for me, how little you think of me as a human being with opinions and feelings!"

"Did anybody ever tell you you're a stupid bore, Vince?"

"Look, I'm trying to control myself, Margaret. Don't push me, goddam it. Sure, I'm a stupid bore—because I don't want my wife hanging out with the biggest man-chasing souse in Los Angeles. Margaret, for God's sake, try to understand you have a weakness and you have to run away from it, not at it."

"Will you stop talking about me as though I belong in a booby-hatch?" she cried. "Oh, I can't stand any more of this. I can't stand it! I can't stand it!"

"You can't stand it!" Vince shouted. "You're the one who causes all the trouble, and now you're the one who can't stand it! You and that pal of yours! You pair of whores!"

"Say it! Say it again! Your favorite word!"

"I've lived with it for ten years, God damn you!"

"Get out, then!" she shrieked. "Get out and don't come crawling back this time! Get out and stay out!"

It was Vince who explained to them about the divorce. He had been gone from the house again for nearly a week, and Margaret had told them, studiously avoiding their eyes, that he was away on another business trip. Now he admitted he had not been away, but had taken a few days off to think things over, because divorces were very serious and took a lot of figuring out. Then he told them that mothers and fathers were just like other people and sometimes they didn't get along well, and would be happier not seeing so much of each other. That didn't mean that they wouldn't see their children any more, he explained. Their children were the most important things in the world to mothers and fathers. And while mothers were better able to feed them and send them off to school all week, and take care of them in many ways, fathers were perfectly capable of providing all sorts of wonderful, fabulous weekends. He mentioned fishing trips and overnight camping and visits to museums. Even dinners in all sorts of restaurants.

While Jeremy's eyes filled with tears, Adam turned and ran into the kitchen and opened the top drawer of the cabinet. Margaret, alone at the kitchen table, asked tensely: "What are you doing, Adam? What do you want with that clothesline?"

He didn't answer. He went back to the living-room, holding the rope behind him.

"Daddy?"

"Yes, Adam?" Vince's voice was gentle.

"Will you do something?"

"If I can, son."

"Sit in the green chair, Daddy." His voice started to waver, but he fought to keep it steady. "And close your eyes. I—Jeremy and I—we have a surprise."

Vince got up from the couch, puzzled, and sat in the green chair.

"Close your eyes."

He closed them.

"Will you keep them closed?" Adam asked.

Vince promised, and Adam beckoned to his brother. He whispered fiercely into Jeremy's ear, and Jeremy nodded, blinking back his tears. Together they crossed the room toward their father.

"Keep your eyes closed. You promised," Adam said.

He handed one end of the rope to Jeremy, who gripped it. Then Adam started to run. Around and around the green chair, his heart pounding as he twisted the rope across his father's chest and over his knees. Around and around. Vince opened his eyes, shocked. He tried to jerk himself from the chair, but he was caught. He called out to Adam, but Adam could not hear him. He was screaming now as he stumbled around the chair.

"We've got him! We've got him, Jeremy!" he screamed. "We've got him!" He saw Margaret standing, white-faced, in the doorway, and he ran to her, flinging himself against her. "Here! Here's the rope!" He thrust it into her hand, sobbing now. Exhaustion gripped him, raking his body as her arms came out and closed around him.

"Baby, baby," she whispered, her voice choked. "My baby."

"We got him," Adam wept. "Tell him to stay, Mommy. Tell him we don't want him to go away."

VII

BUT THE rope made no difference. In the morning, Vince was not there, only Margaret and the redheaded lady from down the street, who had come for breakfast in her bathing suit.

"You'll see, Meg, it's over with so fast down there, it's like a miracle," she said to Margaret. "Why Reno, when you have the kids to worry about? Dozens of people I know got theirs in Mexico. And all this talk about it being illegal is nonsense."

Margaret glanced at the twins.

"Maybe we better talk about it later, Cheryl."

"Oh. Oh, sure. How're you kids today?" Cheryl pulled Jeremy's hair and he giggled, while Adam drew back from the red fingernails and the oversweet smell of gin. "You're a solemn little owl this morning, Adam." She made a long, foolish face, and he smiled politely. "There," she said, "that's better."

Vince did not come to see them that weekend, and Margaret explained that they would start their new schedule a week later, when they were all better adjusted to the whole idea. Then she told them that she would be away for a few days, just a few little days, and Cheryl was going to stay with them.

"You won't be a crybaby, Jeremy, now will you, when Cheryl is here?" He shook his head, and she glanced at Adam, biting her lip. "And you, darling. I wish I knew what goes on inside that funny little brain. Will you be good with Cheryl?"

"Yes."

Cheryl proved to be a gay companion. She read them bedtime stories till they were all the way asleep and made surprises like bananas with faces, and hamburgers with eggs on top. When Margaret returned, Jeremy gave her a lively account of all the things Cheryl had done for them, and for a moment a smile flickered across her face.

"That's fine, darling." But her eyes held a dark, dazed look, as though something terrible had happened to her that she had not yet grasped.

"It's like that in the beginning," Cheryl said. "I didn't want to tell you, Meg. It's like somebody going to the dentist, and you know it's going to hurt them like hell. You wouldn't tell them in advance."

"I had to do it. I had to."

"Of course you did, honey."

"I couldn't take any more, even for the kids' sake."

"Of course you couldn't."

"Never enough money, and always nagging at me. What else could I do? There was nothing else I could do. I had to do it."

"I know you did, honey. He was a real bastard."

Margaret gave her a blank look, then her mouth tightened.

"That's right. He was."

That weekend, when Vince came for them, Margaret stayed in her bedroom. She had a headache, she said, and they could wait for Vince outside in front of the house. They were going to spend a whole weekend with him. They were going to sleep in a hotel and it was going to be great fun.

"I don't want to see him again," Adam heard his mother say fiercely to Cheryl. "I never want to see any part of him again."

"Except the alimony part."

"So? Does that make me a bitch?"

"I didn't say that, honey. You'd be a fool if—"

"He gets plenty in return for his money, doesn't he? I take care of his kids for him, even have them all cleaned up and waiting when he comes to visit them."

"Look, honey, don't apologize to me, for heaven's sake."

"Apologize?" Margaret snapped. "Where'd you ever get that idea. Oh, God. Give me a drink, will you?"

Then one Sunday Vince came early and met Margaret face to face as she opened the screen door to let the twins outside.

"Hello, Margaret. How are you?"

"Vince, I—why, I'm fine. How are you?"

"Fine."

There was a tiny silence.

"I suppose you boys have great plans for the weekend?" Margaret asked finally, her voice very bright.

"We're going deep-sea fishing," Jeremy said.

"Well, not exactly, fellas. I'm afraid we can't do it this time. But we'll have fun anyway. How'd you like to help me move?"

"Where to?" Adam asked.

"I've got a swell little place lined up. It's kind of a motel, only people live there all year round. I know we'll like it. It'll be like having our own little house."

"We have our own house," Jeremy said.

Vince's eyes went quickly to Margaret's face, and for a moment they seemed to be seeking each other out, like two people in a crowd whose eyes duck this way and that to find each other. But the moment passed and they looked away.

"The other place will just be our weekend house," Vince said. "Hotel life gets a little expensive."

Adam felt an unendurable pressure pushing inside of him to be off, away from here, away from their seeking eyes.

"Come on, Daddy, let's go."

The motel was on a court. All the little cabins had bright ceramic symbols embedded in the stucco, turquoise palm trees and yellow suns with rays like spiders' feet. The stucco was in need of paint, the courtyard a shabby square with the remains of a garden in the center. They had to jump over a puddle to get into Vince's cabin. There were two rooms inside. Vince had a studio bed in the living-room, and in the bedroom they found a double-decker bunk bed, and windows like portholes, looking onto the back of another motel.

"Not bad, huh?" Vince asked enthusiastically. "We could fix up your room to look like a real ship's cabin. Get an old anchor and paint it white, to hang on the wall."

But they never did much to fix up the bedroom, for it never seemed very important. After all, it was just a room to sleep in once a week.

The summer drew to an end, and Margaret took them to register for their first grade. That weekend Vince bought them red pencils and new-smelling notebooks—enough, Margaret laughed lightly, to last them through college. Vince laughed too. They never quarreled now. Only once was there a sign of the old discord. That was the time Margaret didn't get her weekly alimony when it was due.

"I know," Vince said. "I'm awfully sorry. I—my budget just didn't work out right this month. With the kids and all. Week-ends get so damned expensive."

"So do weekdays," Margaret said shortly.

"I know. I know all about it."

"Well, try to keep it in mind."

"I try all the time, Margaret."

"Well, try harder."

Even that blew over quickly, and one day Jeremy said to Adam: "They like each other now. I think soon they'll come

and be married again." After a second he said: "Don't you, Adam?"

"No," Adam said.

There was nothing to show that summer was over except for school, and frequently at three o'clock Cheryl picked them up in her car and took them to the beach, as before. Cheryl had lots of friends, who all called Margaret "Meg" and made a great fuss over the twins.

But weekends with Vince were never quite as he had promised. Somehow he didn't get around to buying the sleeping bags for outdoor camping, and they usually took in a Saturday movie, and spent Sunday scrambling eggs for breakfast, then lolling about the motel cabin with the comics. Once in a while Vince took out a pair of junior boxing gloves and supervised a match.

"You never even took us deep-sea fishing," Jeremy said once, accusingly.

"I know, son." Vince ran a harassed hand through his hair. "God, I'm sorry about that. We'll do it some weekend soon."

"Next weekend."

"Okay, that's a deal."

But when the weekend came and he picked them up in the car, he said: "Long drive ahead, boys. A hundred miles up the coast!"

They forgot about the fishing trip, climbing into the car, bright with interest.

"We're going to see a friend of mine," Vince explained. "A very special friend. You'll like her."

"A lady?" asked Jeremy in a flat voice.

"Yes."

"I don't like her," Jeremy said.

Vince laughed.

"How do you know when you haven't even met her?"

"Maybe he just knows," said Adam. He moved closer to his brother so their knees would touch as they rounded a curve.

Vince kept pointing out the beauties of the Pacific coastline as they drove north.

"Look at that ocean. Makes you want to jump right in, doesn't it? Funny autumn out here. Remember in New York how everything changed when summer came to an end? The leaves turned all red and brown and the air smelled different all of a sudden. Out here it just goes on and on. Of course there'll be a rainy season before long, and they say that's pretty nasty."

"Daddy?"

"Yes, Jeremy?"

"Can we stop now for hot dogs?"

"Not today. We're expected at my friend's for lunch."

"What is she going to make?"

"Oh, I don't know. Some kind of surprise, I expect. She makes some wonderful Mexican dishes, like chili, or maybe even tortillas." Vince smacked his lips. "Mmmm."

"She doesn't cook as good as Mommy," said Jeremy.

Vince smiled briefly and said nothing. The road curved in from the ocean now, and Adam stared out the window.

"There it is," Vince said suddenly. "See that house up there?"

They craned their necks to stare at it. The road rose sharply, and at its highest point, standing out against the sky, was the house. The house in no way suggested California. It was of white frame, two stories high—no, three. A pair of attic windows jutted out in front, and a round, glass-enclosed turret shot up from one corner of the roof.

As they approached, Adam saw that the house was freshly painted, with bright red frames around the windows, and a red porch. In the front garden, ludicrously, sat two giant cactus plants.

"That's a crazy house," Jeremy announced. "That's crazier than Grandma's house in Boston, even."

This time Vince laughed aloud.

"Yes, it is, isn't it? I get a kick every time I see it. It's like a hunk of Brooklyn looking over the Pacific. That's the way her father wanted it. He was always homesick for the East."

SPRING INTO SUMMER

They went up the red porch steps. Jeremy clung to his father's hand, but Adam walked alone.

"Can I ring the bell, Daddy?"

"Sure thing, Jeremy."

He rang, and they heard a chime somewhere inside the house.

"Actually, we can go in," Vince said, "the door is never locked."

They entered a vestibule with a tiled floor and narrow stained-glass windows. Beyond it sat a cool, dim hallway.

"Anybody home?" Vince called.

"Vince?" The reply came from overhead in a clear, cool voice. "Be right down, darling."

Quick footsteps followed, and the three of them gazed up the stairway.

At first Adam saw her legs as she rounded the newel post, in a pair of tight Mexican matador pants that came just below her knees, exposing strong, shapely calves. She started down toward them. Above the pants she wore a brightly striped shirt, open at the throat. Without conscious thought, Adam had been sure she would be dark like Margaret—in fact, would resemble Margaret in every way. Now he saw, shocked as she emerged into the light, that her hair was very fair, and even her brows and lashes were a thick, pale color. She stood smiling at Vince.

"Hello," she said, a little breathlessly.

Then, her smile becoming grave, she looked at Jeremy.

"You're Jeremy," she said, without hesitation, and turning:

"And you are Adam. Welcome to Los Pepinos."

This was Vicki.

VIII

SHE TOLD them about Los Pepinos during lunch, while they dipped cucumbers into a strange hot sauce in an earthenware pot, and carried them dripping to their lips. When her father

had bought the land on top of the cliff, she said, "he had found a cucumber garden laid out in a most mysterious way in the midst of the wild shrubs and cactus plants. So he called the place Los Pepinos. The Cucumbers."

Jeremy's cucumber dripped in mid-air.

"How did the garden get there?" he demanded.

"How would you guess?"

"Fairies?"

"No."

"Elfs?"

Vicki shook her head and turned to Adam.

"What do you think?"

Adam dipped his cucumber and bit into it silently.

"Vicki asked you a question, Adam," said his father.

"I think there were secret dead people who lived in the garden."

He saw a frown draw his father's brows together.

"My God, you pick up the most morbid ideas, Adam!" Vince's voice was annoyed. "What the devil do you mean by secret dead people?"

But Vicki touched Vince's arm.

"As a matter of fact, darling, he isn't too wrong," she said. "The people were very secret, if not dead. They were a family of Mexicans who lived in a little cave in the side of the cliff. Of course the cave was washed away in that big storm two or three years ago, or I'd show it to you." With a smile she turned to Vince. "Adam was just giving me the business, darling. Like a snare with a false bottom, set out to catch a tiger in the jungle."

Vince looked startled.

"Do you think you should? I mean, in front of—"

"Nothing like a nice open discussion, I always say." Vicki looked across at Adam, her smile lazy. But as he stared back at her he caught no trace of a smile in her eyes. Her eyes were a chilled bright blue that watched him steadily. He had an instant's terrifying sensation of being drawn across the table into her eyes, held drowning in them, but not quite drowned.

He did not know how long the terror lasted, until, through a ringing in his ears, he heard her say: "Little boys understand a lot of things they aren't given credit for, don't they, Adam?"

Without waiting for his reply, she turned casually back to Vince and started to speak of something else. Adam sat crouched in his chair and wondered if the incident had been real. Now, with her profile to him, Vicki's face was smooth and serene, and it was difficult to recall the expression he had seen there. Yet he did not want to forget it, for he sensed that this would be self-betrayal. He glanced at Jeremy. But Jeremy was happy and unaware, engrossed in wiping up some sauce on a piece of bread. Adam turned back to his own thoughts. Jeremy was unreliable. Jeremy would make the biggest show of independence, then succumb at the first kindly sign. He reminded Adam of the little red trailer that had been tied to their car coming out to California with Margaret. It had always balked when the car started, then quick as a wink it would give in and come along, jogging up and down as though it were laughing and having a jolly time.

But this woman—Vicki. Adam's dark eyes watched her, narrowed in concentration. Her hand lay on the table, her fingers trailing over Vince's wrist in an accidental sort of way as she described the book she had been reading. Strong fingers, resting so lightly on Vince's wrist that it seemed as if the slightest movement would have blown them away. Yet the moment Vince moved his arm in speaking, the light fingers spread, like a spider quickly gripping its prey, making escape impossible.

Adam's eyes leaped back to her face, but her expression had not changed. She was listening attentively to Vince, until with a sudden burst she interrupted him.

"But, darling! You've missed the underlying point of the whole book! Didn't you get the historical implications? How can you take such a superficial view?"

Vince grinned.

"I guess I'm just not the intellectual type, hon."

"Purely a matter of development. We'll get you there yet." Her eyes moved lightly across his face; then she said: "Let's

take the kids down to the beach. Then we'll come back and have some ice cream."

"I like ice cream," Jeremy announced. "Daddy said they sell ice cream on the fishing boat." He sent Vicki a sudden, accusing look, as he remembered. "We were supposed to go fishing today. Deep-sea fishing. We couldn't go because we had to come here instead."

There was a barely detectable pause, before Vicki said: "But we're going tomorrow. Didn't Vince tell you? The boat leaves Kana Dock at seven in the morning. That's about five miles from here. Vince, I bet you were saving it for a surprise, weren't you?"

"Huh?"

"Weren't you, Vince?"

"Why—yes! Yes, as a matter of fact, I was."

"See?"

She met Adam's disbelieving eyes with a bland look.

"Come on, fellows, to the beach. Then ice cream. By the way, do you kids take afternoon naps?"

They did. But Jeremy glanced at Adam and waited.

"No, we don't," Adam said.

"Good. We'll have that much more time together. Anyway, we'll all go to bed early tonight, to get up with the dawn to go fishing."

She pulled Vince up from the table. For a moment they stood together, both of them tall and blond, like a pair of beautifully matched horses. Vicki even tossed her head in a willful, playful way, like a filly, swinging her thick blond mane. Adam was aware for the first time—and the assurance did not please him, but smoldered inside like a dark threat—that this time the promise would be kept, and they would go deep-sea fishing.

The fishing trip was the beginning of a new era. Suddenly there was so much to do that the weekends were not long enough. There were picnics and kite-flying jaunts, outdoor weenie roasts and visits to quaint restaurants in out-of-the-way

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places. When Vicki was in Los Angeles, they went to the Hollywood Bowl for their first concert. Vince promised them an auto race and a tennis match, and now there was not the least doubt that it would all come true. It was as though some great invisible hand had laid itself over their lives, and the machinery ran without flaw for the first time. Jeremy clung to his father with renewed respect, while Adam made the most important discovery of his life. He discovered that there were two worlds.

The two worlds were like oneself and one's shadow. There was always a connecting place, and the world of oneself was always the same size. But the shadow world could change at any moment, could lengthen or deepen, could stretch ahead or lag behind, and there were times when it could merge so wholly with the world of oneself that it was forgotten entirely. It was like a queer, secret game. In the static world he smiled and ran and gripped his father's fingers, much as Jeremy did. And in the shadow world he stood watching the antics of this real Adam with frowning eyes. At times it seemed to him that this live Adam was the pretense, and the shadow standing off and watching was really himself.

At home with Margaret, the shadow world came rarely. But at Los Pepinos, it always seemed to be hovering, in readiness for him. He came to a constant awareness of it, like a protection into which he could slip at any time, if danger came near. For he knew there was a danger, though he could not have named it.

But even at Los Pepinos the weekends had a busy, gay surface, and there were days when Adam had no need to use his secret escape. Vicki, with her all-knowing eyes, seemed to sense when the bad moments threatened and was always ready for them, with some swift, immediate remedy.

"Let's pop some corn," she would say suddenly. Or "We ought to drag those old sleeping bags out of the attic and plan an overnight trip. Let's! Right now!"

There was an old canvas bag up in the attic with all sorts of camping equipment in it. Corn-poppers and frying pans, and spears to roast franks on.

"Father and I were great campers," Vicki said. "I didn't have any mother, and it was easier to take me out to the woods and feed me rabbit stew than to go shopping and look things up in cookbooks. Maybe we can bag a rabbit of our own. I have Dad's shotgun, all cleaned and oiled, behind the kitchen door. Can you shoot, Vince?"

"I do pretty well with ducks in a shooting gallery."

"Good. Dad was a crack shot." Her eyes moved across Vince's face, which was very handsome with its new sunburn. "He was a great guy and a wonderful father. Vince, you look amazingly like him." She laughed. "I hate to think what a psychiatrist would say."

Vince took the shotgun from behind the kitchen door, and showed the boys how to load and unload it and explained what the parts were, and how it must never be pointed at anyone, even when it was empty. Adam's eyes trailed the length of the rounded blue-black metal, and he thought the sheen on the barrel very beautiful. Then he glanced at Vince, and his expression grew almost brooding. Vince had re-established himself by having corralled a woman like Vicki and incited in her a regard of which Margaret had obviously found him unworthy. For deep inside, Adam had found one certain thought in all the pools of uncertainty. Vicki was no ordinary woman. But his pride in his father was mingled with a reluctance to accept the new *status quo*.

"I like Vicki," Jeremy had said to him.

Adam hadn't replied.

"Daddy likes her too. She's his best friend."

"Yes."

"Maybe if Vicki told him to, he'd come back and be married to Mommy again," Jeremy suggested, ever hopeful. "Then you and I and Vicki could be the children, and go camping with them."

"We couldn't do that."

"Why not?"

Adam hesitated. At last he said: "Because Mommy hasn't

any sleeping bag." He knew this was not the real reason, but he did not know what the real reason was.

"Maybe Vicki doesn't like Mommy," Jeremy said suddenly. "Maybe that's why Mommy couldn't go."

But Vicki did like Margaret. Even Adam, baffled, had to admit it. Once when they were having lunch at Los Pepinos, Jeremy described a salad Margaret had made, and Vicki said admiringly that she had heard Margaret was a wonderful cook, when she wanted to bother. Then when they wore the shirts Margaret had initialed for them, Vicki exclaimed about how beautifully Margaret embroidered, though she discovered that the tail had been left off on one of Jeremy's letters. This she skillfully corrected with her needle. "There!" she declared. "I'm sure Margaret never meant to be this careless."

He wasn't so sure that Margaret returned Vicki's esteem. When she saw the bit of embroidery Vicki had completed for her, she glanced across the kitchen at Cheryl, who was helping her prepare for a party that night.

"Will you look at this, Cheryl?"

Cheryl looked, snorting.

"Well, I hope you thanked her, Jeremy."

"I did."

Margaret turned sharply, walked across the kitchen, and opened the cupboard. As she reached to an upper shelf, Cheryl said: "My God, you're getting thin as a rail, Meg." Adam looked at his mother's arms. The elbows jutted out, and her hand was almost clawlike as it carried a bottle down from the shelf. The enormous yellow ring she wore looked somehow ludicrous. He wanted, fiercely and without reason, to cry. Then she turned, pouring something from the bottle into a tiny glass, and relief flooded him. For her face was the same. There was nothing strange about the dark, pretty face that he knew utterly.

"Some things call for a little drinkie," Margaret said.

Cheryl laughed, in the light, sly, adult way that made Adam and Jeremy look at each other.

Later, in bed, Jeremy whispered across to Adam that their mother did not like Vicki, but Adam's reply never came.

On rainy days there was always something new to discover at Los Pepinos. There was a bookcase in the basement with stacks of books that had once been Vicki's, books filled with pictures, or even with cut-outs that could be folded and made to stand by themselves. In the attic they found a stereoscope, and hundreds of travel pictures. They would spend hours squinting through the lens, never tiring of the magic. The attic was like an enormous treasure chest. It had a player piano and a cage with a stuffed squirrel, a collection of mineral rocks, and a drawer full of sea shells. In the little round glass-enclosed turret was an old hand-wound phonograph. On the inside of the cover, the picture of a small white dog stared into the end of the loudspeaker as though he were constantly amazed at the noises coming out of it. The records they found gave them a strange musical repertoire, and at home they could send Margaret's friends into gales of laughter by singing "Bye, Bye, Blackbird" or "Chérie."

Then one day Vicki showed them the mirror room.

She made them close their eyes while she opened the door with a key. With his eyes shut, Adam felt her touch his hand. He drew back quickly.

But Vicki smiled down at him.

"Silly! What did you think I was going to do to you? Close your eyes again and give me your hand."

He obeyed. He felt her fingers close over his and he allowed her to lead him forward, his eyes tightly closed.

She took her hand away and he sensed that she had retreated, leaving him alone.

"Open your eyes."

He blinked in the center of a strange room. The first thing he saw was Jeremy staring at him. He started toward his brother and saw another boy, with his back to him, who also appeared to be Jeremy. Adam stopped, confused, and stood very still, staring at the wall. Then slowly he turned his head

and saw that the whole room was walled with mirrors. Everywhere he looked, Jeremy looked back at him. There were five Jeremy's—no, there were ten. Each way he turned, the figures turned with him. He took a step, and Jeremy came toward him, stepped back from him, then stood staring into his eyes once more.

"Jeremy," he said, and his voice seemed to echo, so that for a moment real panic seized him, as if the room were really of the fantastic dimensions suggested by the mirrors, and all true perspective had vanished. Then he saw the doorway, a narrow, dark aperture in the gleaming walls, where Vince stood laughing with Vicki, and Jeremy giggled in delight at his brother's bewilderment.

"Jeremy!" Adam cried, and ran to him. Now anger replaced his confusion, and he struck out wildly, not knowing whether he aimed at Jeremy or Vicki or even Vince.

"Adam!"

Vince grabbed at him, lifting him high, holding the flailing arms flat against his chest. "Cut that out! It was just a joke, you little sorehead!"

"Adam—watch!"

It was Vicki, her voice high and gay. Adam stopped struggling, caught by her cry, and turned his head. Vicki stepped into the room and began to twirl about from one corner to the next. Adam felt his father's arms lowering him to the floor. He stood staring at Vicki, at a hundred dancing, twirling Vickis in a room that had no end, that went on and on into a deep tunnel, like layers of film laid one upon another so that you could look through all of them at once. And suddenly he knew. This was the other world. This room!

He saw Vicki whirl to a stop, bowing breathlessly in front of him. He turned and buried his face against his father, his arms wrapped around Vince's legs, clinging tightly. Fingers tugged at him, light strong fingers, Vicki's fingers.

"Oh, come on," she said, laughing. "You're not still mad at me, are you?"

He felt himself turning back, hesitant. Then he stepped

past her kneeling figure into the room. His eyes were wide and dark, and he stepped cautiously, crossing the floor to come face to face with his own image, two inches away, one inch. He pressed his face to the glass, felt it. Behind him, as he turned his head, he saw Jeremy advancing into the room. He watched, motionless, as the real Jeremy stepped into the unreal world.

Vicki's voice sounded far away.

"Shall I tell you about this room?"

Adam waited, pressed against the glass, feeling it cool on his cheek.

"I was just a little girl." That was impossible. Vicki had never been a little girl. "I was an only child. No brothers or sisters, just my father. He was very wonderful, but I was lonely. There were no other children for miles and miles around. My father promised he would find someone for me to play with—and so he did. It was just like him to think of something so strange, and yet so wonderful! One day he came back from Los Angeles in a truck with some other men—he used to go down there on business. He told me the men were going to fix something in the house, and he and I would take a long walk and come back to find all the hammering finished. This was my bedroom then, and Dad sent me up for some little thing when we came back from our walk. The truck was gone and, to tell the truth, I had had such a long interesting time with my father that I'd forgot all about it anyway. Well, I walked into my room and here it was. Every place I looked there was a little girl just like me. Not too big or too small, but just right to play dolls with me, or to share my secrets. I was never alone in this house again."

After a long, still moment, Jeremy asked: "Where did you sleep?"

"My bed was here, and all my things. After Dad died, I moved into another room and put my belongings up in the attic."

"Then you had a little girl sleeping next to you in a bed next to yours?" Adam heard Jeremy say.

"That's right."

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"Your father was a funny man, wasn't he?"

"He was a wonderful man who was never afraid of anything or anyone. He was bold and strong, in his body and in his mind."

Bold and strong. . . .

Adam pressed against the glass.

"I have to go to the bathroom, Daddy," Jeremy said.

From a corner of the mirror came a reflection of Jeremy's hand clinging to Vince's. Then both of them disappeared. Only Vicki was there, still kneeling by the doorway, leaning back on her legs and watching him.

"Come here, Adam," she said softly.

As she held out her hands, renewed panic stung him. He choked back a wail of fear and started blindly toward the door. Toward Vicki. She caught him, pulled him close to her.

"No," he said. "No!"

"Yes." She held him in a grip that hurt, but he would not cry out. *Bold and strong.* "Listen to me," she said in a low, rapid voice. "You're a foolish little boy to hate me so. I can give you things you've never had before. Things you want. I know, because I wanted them too. Like this room. You'd like this room for your very own, wouldn't you?"

His eyes widened.

"Well, it's yours. Here—take the key. And you can fix it up any way you like, with things from the attic. But you mustn't hate me. If I give you this room, will you hate me?"

Voiceless, he shook his head.

"Will you love me?"

"Okay," he whispered.

She let go of him. A strange, triumphant little smile touched her face and she got to her feet and left him. He could feel the pressure where her hands had gripped him.

After a moment he turned, closing the door, alone in his room. He walked once more toward the mirrors. As he approached, his reflection grew taller, leaner. *Bold and strong.* Everywhere he looked, he saw himself, Adam, grown up and walking through the world of mirrors bravely, afraid of no one.

IX

HE STARED straight ahead of him at the city sky, aware of Dr. Kiraly's figure seated behind the desk, the tips of her fingers coming together in a thoughtful pose. He felt unwilling to meet her eyes, shaken by the proximity of that long-ago time, now that he had searched with her through the fallen leaves. Things he had assumed forgotten—better forgotten—were suddenly painful and fresh. They might have happened days ago instead of years ago. It was unnatural to have bridged the gap so abruptly, as though nothing lay between that time and this. It might have been only a moment ago that Jeremy had reached up to take his father's hand, and now, a moment later, Jeremy was dead.

"Sometimes," he heard himself say dimly, "I wonder if the mirror room was really there. Or if it was just one of those dreams."

"How long had you been visiting Los Pepinos before you discovered the mirror room?"

"A couple of months, I guess. The door was always there, but it had never been unlocked before. Funny, I can't even remember what became of the key Vicki gave me." He roused himself now, trying to shake off the feeling of numbness. "I'm kidding myself. I know damn well the room was there. I even remember the way the lights were set into the wall, in the corners, and the way the windows were, with inside shutters. White shutters. The room had to be there. It still is. Because—"

"Yes?"

"Because that's where I killed Jeremy, only a week ago," he said, his voice harsh.

Dr. Kiraly glanced down at her desk and made a small mark, like a curlicue, with her pencil.

"And how soon after you discovered the mirror room did your father marry Vicki?"

"They were married around Christmas."

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"That same year?"

"Yes." His mouth twisted. "Everybody seems to have been in a big hurry about it. My mother got married about four months later."

"Oh?"

"That's right. She got a part-time job after Vince married. There'd been some trouble about money. He had to cut down on what he was sending us, something like that. Anyway, she got this job in a store, a sporting-goods store. That's how she met Edmond. He came in to buy ammunition for his gun. He was a cop."

"A policeman? In uniform?"

"Not exactly. Not any more. He graduated to some kind of high-class job in the Commissioner's office. He acted like the time he'd been a cop on the corner was very funny." Adam looked down at his hands, touched the small scar beneath his left thumb without seeming to notice it. "Vicki always said he was ashamed of being a cop, since he was a college man, even belonged to a fraternity. I guess he really was ashamed of it—except for the time he killed somebody. He went out on a call once and shot someone. Killed him. A thief, I think it was. I remember the first time I heard him talking about it. It was at a party, at our house. He sounded—I don't know. Like God. Like God, who'd just punished somebody." He paused. "I remember a lot of things Vicki said about Edmond. She hated him. She used to enjoy pulling him apart, sort of analyzing him. Once she said he was a fanatic. How did she put it? Oh—I remember. She said that fanatics were—were always overcompensating for secret doubts. When I was a little older, it stuck in my mind."

"Did you believe it?"

"I'm not sure. But sometimes he did things that made me think of what Vicki said. He was a fanatic about justice."

"Justice?"

"Yes. Because of the way he made his money, Vicki said. Everybody knew it was mostly graft, it was that kind of a job. He used to shrug it off as being part of the game. You know—

if he didn't do it, somebody else would. But he was always on the lookout for somebody else doing something wrong, as if right and wrong were always on his mind. Bothering him. And he always made sure the other people were punished. I guess that was what Vicki meant, about the overcompensation."

He broke off suddenly. It seemed to him that his voice had been droning on and on, for a long time. He felt the uneasiness of a person who realizes all at once that he has been monopolizing the conversation. He saw Dr. Kiraly glance at her watch, and shame deepened inside of him.

"I guess I talked a lot," he said.

"Yes, you're doing very well." Her voice was perfectly pleasant, and he felt easier. Then she said: "Tomorrow is Saturday, Adam. We don't have office hours over the weekend. So perhaps you'd like to take care of this week's bill today."

The blood rushed to his face. It was the first time in his life he had ever been asked point-blank to pay a bill. He fumbled for his wallet. All his insecurities of a moment ago taking root in anger against her. *Bitch*, he thought. *Double, double bitch!*

After he had given her the money, he got up without looking at her and started for the door.

"I'll see you Monday, Adam. If you'll wait just a moment, Mrs. Bussie will show you out."

"I know how to get out."

"See you Monday, then."

He hardly heard her. He did not need Mrs. Bussie. He did not need anyone. He stepped out into the hallway and closed the apartment door behind him. As always, the narrow enclosure of the hallway started that nameless fear inside him, but he fought it angrily now, and rang for the elevator. He was irked and offended by the way Dr. Kiraly treated him. When her voice was reasoning, it drove him wild with impatience. On the other hand, when she spoke to him with that peculiar directness—asking him for the money that way—she was treating him like a child, to whom the subtleties of social behavior would have no meaning. He was sorry he had told her only

of the part of his life that had been his early childhood. Without a doubt, he was just that small boy to her, the boy he had been describing.

Bitch.

He stepped into the elevator and, to stem the instant nausea, stared hard at the back of the elevator attendant in his gray uniform. He wondered bitterly what the man would think if he knew he was carrying a murderer down the narrow shaft, opening the door of the lobby to let a murderer loose in the streets.

The weekend was like a long, strange dream.

He lay across his bed, unable to think of anything but the girl, the girl on the stairs.

At the slightest sound from the hallway he would leap up and, opening his door, peer out of his room. He discovered an assortment of roomers, a man with long gray hair and a clarinet case, two sisters who could only have been schoolteachers, and a handful of young men who were either clerks or banktellers or assistants to vice-presidents. But the girl did not appear. Each time, brooding, he turned back to his room and locked his door.

There was no reason he could have named for this will to see her. With the exception of Allegra, he had rarely known a desire toward a girl. At school he had been considered aloof, had even acquired a mild reputation as a woman-hater. Yet now he found it impossible to drive a perfectly strange girl out of his thoughts.

He decided to question his landlady about her and started down the stairs. Halfway, his breath froze in his chest. A door had opened below, a slim crack, and someone was watching him. He turned around, his heart beating madly, and went upstairs again. In his room, he drew the shade to the bottom sill, though he did not dare to put the lights out. He sat trembling, waiting for someone to knock at the door. It did not come. Finally he went to the window and raised the shade. He

stood staring out at the silent ashcans. What a fool he had been! To call attention to himself because of a girl he did not know, a girl he could not even have described.

Just as well that this had happened. He had grown too cocky. After all the real traps he had escaped, it would be too ironic to be trapped by his own complacency.

He went over to his bed and lay on his back staring up at the ceiling. There was a damp, mildewed spot directly overhead. The outline of a woman's form detached itself from the rest of the spot and his eyes moved quickly away, then came quickly back. It was a sign that he would soon meet her. The girl on the stairs.

He tried to imagine how it would happen. She would knock at his door. When he opened it she would clap her hand across her mouth, faltering as she explained that a girl she knew had been living in this room, and that she had had no idea that someone else now lived here. Casually, he would invite her in. To have a drink. On one wall there would be a bar. No, the top drawer of the maple dresser was just a front. Behind it he had a miniature bar, even ice cubes. She was fascinated by the bar, particularly when he explained that he was an engineering student and that the bar had been his own invention, that he had built it himself. They talked, sprawled carelessly across the bed. They smoked cigarettes. She said: "You have some tobacco on your mouth," and reached to brush it away. He caught at her wrist. He held it easily, but her eyes, dark eyes, stared gravely up at him. No—her eyes were gray, steel gray, like no one else's.

He lay engulfed by his fantasy. He closed his eyes and pressed his hand to his mouth, forcing his lips apart so that he tasted his own skin with his tongue, as he might have tasted her mouth. He turned, leaning over his pillow. He plumped it to make it rounded, more resilient, and pressed against it. The top of the pillow was divided by his arm, so that the two points rose up toward his face, like white breasts. His eyes closed, he took his arm away and buried his face between the points of the pillow and whispered, "Darling. . . ."

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He heard her whisper back: "You're hurting me. Adam!"

"I want to hurt you," he muttered. And she cried: "Hurt me! Hurt me!" In the back of his mind something told him to stop, that he would be sorry and ashamed. But he pressed against her, dark dazzling circles rising more and more vividly behind his closed eyes, his breath quick and uneven. She clung to him. "Hurt me!"

At last he lay still. He turned his face slowly and felt the heat of the pillow beneath his cheek. Without looking at it, he thrust the pillow roughly away from him, all the way to the wall, so that it should not touch him. Disgust rolled over him like a physical thing, leaving his body damp. He loathed himself and despised all women. They were ugly and cheap. Every one of them.

He closed his eyes again, and finally, fitfully, he slept.

Then on Sunday night he found her.

He had been out for dinner, had sat too dejected to do more than pick at his food. There was a drizzle in the air that reminded him of the night he had arrived in New York. Walking back toward the rooming house, he had felt the presence of shadows hovering about him. With anxious steps he turned in at the doorway and started up the stairs. As his eyes came level with the second-floor hallway, a door opened directly opposite his own. By instinct he ducked backward, almost out of sight. Then he saw her.

"Nick?" In that one querying word he detected a host of qualities. Her voice was sure, almost sharp, telling the intruder that if he was Nick he might advance; if not—get out. He was impressed with this, a proper suspicion on the part of one stranger toward another. He raised his head above the bottom stalks of the banister to see her. She wore the jeans, flat rolls of denim encircling her calves, and now he glanced at them and made a quick, conscious comparison. They were slimmer than Vicki's, but there was a certain quality that was the same. Endurance. . . .

"Nick?"

This time she leaned out of her doorway, glimpsed Adam, and drew back. "Sorry. I thought it was somebody else."

He had a moment of wretched indecision. Even if he took a chance, got to know her, it would be sheer folly. It would mean trusting someone, and he must not.

She was closing her door.

"No—wait!"

He hurried up the rest of the steps. She moved so swiftly that he hardly saw her action, but was left standing in the hallway with the disquieting awareness that she had cleverly shot the chain bolt on the inside of her door. She stared out at him through a six-inch space.

"What do you want?" Her voice was hostile.

"You—you don't remember me?"

"No."

"I met you on the stairs. The other day."

"Look, Buster, I never saw you before, and I advise you to scam before my brother gets here and takes you apart."

He was caught between admiration and anxiety.

"But I live here! Right here. See? Here's my key. Wait—I'll open my door and prove it!" He hurried to number nine and pushed the key into the lock. It wouldn't turn. A brief panic assailed him, then fled as the key fitted properly and the door opened. Automatically he flicked on the light inside. "You see? You see?" he cried. He turned back to her. "I told you I live here!"

The light made a shaft from his room and played onto the aperture into hers. He caught his first real glimpse of her, of a square little face with very white skin and a spattering of freckles. From the pale forehead her hair seemed to leap up, the kind of hair that can only have been cut before a bathroom mirror with a pair of manicure scissors. It danced about her head, catching reddish highlights this way and that, as though it shared some restless secret with the freckles and the tough little upturned nose. Her face surprised, but did not displease, him.

"You remember now, don't you?" His voice was eager. "It

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was on the stairs. Right here—downstairs. We didn't exactly meet, I mean nobody introduced us. But I was coming up and you were going down, remember? I—I called you by another name. Vicki."

Her eyes seemed to narrow.

"You remember, don't you?"

"Maybe I do, but so what?"

He grasped at this. She did remember, but, womanlike, refused to give in. He knew that this was a qualified female phenomenon, but a certain amount of experience had taught him that it could be beaten.

"I wanted to apologize to you," he said slyly.

"Huh?"

Now she peered out as though she were trying to see him better, to determine what sort of creature would make such a senseless statement. But she was interested. Adam recognized the signs, saw the symptoms of capitulation, and a kind of contempt curled his mouth.

"Look," she said suddenly, "are you from out of town?"

"Yes."

There was a little pause. Then, as though it were a dramatic decision, she stepped back and undid the chain on her door, opening it wide.

"You live here long?"

He shook his head.

"That explains it. I guess you figure you're getting a cold reception in New York." She said it indulgently, as she might have explained it to a child. "But you've got to understand that New York's a pretty rough place. If you go around expecting strange girls to talk to you, you'll get in trouble. See?"

Adam nodded, gravely, as though her advice were new to him, something he didn't already know, something he hadn't known from the day he was born. Meanwhile his private thoughts churned on. Why had he thought her like the others? She was nothing like any of the three, with her little square freckled face, like the face of a Kewpie doll you might win at

a cheap carnival. How had he ever compared her with Allegra, all beauty, all charm?

"It takes awhile to get used to New York. It isn't a small town where everybody's your pal, you know." She broke off suddenly, touching the collar of her plaid shirt where it stood up behind her neck. He wasn't sure whether the gesture was one of self-consciousness or of irritation. "What are you looking at me like that for? You still thinking about what's-her-name? Vicki?"

He shook his head quickly. But something in her voice jarred his complacency. He struggled to recover his ground. What would please her most? Some bit of flattery?

"As a matter of fact, I was thinking about what a nice voice you have."

"Oh, come on. Look, kid, you don't have to hand me that kind of stuff. I opened the door. That means I'm friendly, see? Anytime you want to borrow a bottle-opener, you can knock."

Now he stood openly uncertain, deflated by the combination of her almost childish physical being and the assured sophistication of her talk. She was probably still in her teens, yet he could not deny that she intrigued him. Even the silly tangled hair intrigued him. . . .

"Well," she said abruptly, "I've got to go now. My brother'll be here soon."

"Good night," Adam said.

"See you around."

In his own room, he leaned back against the door. After a moment he crossed the room and dragged the armchair back toward the doorway. He sat listening for perhaps a quarter of an hour, but no sound came from the hall.

He sat there, smiling his thin, indrawn smile. She had lied to him. She had changed toward him in some unforeseeable moment. Something must have shown in his face. Maybe it was written all over him, what he was. Or maybe in some way she had been able to guess at his thoughts, his fantasy of yesterday. The idea stabbed at him, started his face burning. If she knew, if she knew how he had thought of her!

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The telephone rang in the downstairs hall. Adam pressed his ear to the door and heard it ring again, then stop. The landlady's voice shrilled up the stairs.

"Pat! Pat Barnes!"

Pat. That was she. It had to be. It was the perfect name. It would always be her name. Pat. Little and tough and smart. He knew she was smart.

He heard the door open across the hall and drew back with a ducking motion, as if she might have caught him eavesdropping. Her footsteps padded down the steps and stopped. He opened the door. He could not hear her voice, but he heard her start up the steps again, more slowly, tap, tap, tap. He shoved his chair back across the room and was standing outside his door, pushing the key into the lock, when she reappeared.

He waited a second, then glanced up.

"Oh." Did it sound artificial? "Hello there."

"Hello." She continued toward her room, pausing to thrust a cigarette between her lips and light it.

"Isn't your brother coming?"

She swung around and stared at him. The cigarette hung from her lips, a little shocking. Adam thought, like a secret smoke stolen by a child in some dark corner. But he stood his ground, for at least she was aware of him.

"I thought maybe you'd come down and have coffee."

"Coffee?" She took the cigarette in her fingers, and her mouth gave a sudden downward twitch. "You country kids don't waste any time. Okay. I'll have coffee. Do me good. Providing you don't mind the dungarees."

"No. The kids wore them in college."

Her eyebrows went up.

"College, huh? I'm having coffee with society. You never know who lives just across the hall, do you?" She reached up and gave her collar a yank to make sure it stood up in the back. "I'm dressed. Let's go."

As they went down the stairs, he was pleased and rather amazed by the ease with which the whole thing had been ac-

complished. He thought fleetingly of Allegra, and of Buff, who had once been his friend and who had poked merciless fun at him for his inability to handle women. Both of them would have been less smug had they seen the way he had approached this girl. Certainly he had done a smooth job of it. He hummed to himself, the switch from uncertainty to joy as swift as the flash of a bird's wing in the sunlight.

"We could go to the Tamotua," Pat said.

"What a queer name!"

"You never heard of it?"

"No."

"It's easier spelled backwards."

He turned the letters over in his mind as he walked down the street at her side.

"I don't get it."

"The Automat."

"Tano—oh."

"We named it that where I work. Made it more fun to eat there. Sounds glamorous." She stopped, mashing out the cigarette against a metal railing.

He glanced at her, at the concise way her features fitted together. The square, short face, more serious in profile. The nose was small but alert, and her lashes stood straight out, no nonsense about them. As though she felt his scrutiny, she looked at him. The street light shone directly into her eyes. He saw softness there, saw it vanish quickly, but he had seen it.

"What're you looking at?"

"You. Isn't it allowed?"

"I guess it's allowed." She indicated a lighted shop across the street. "We could try the Viennese place. They have terrific pastries—but they're expensive."

"That's okay. It's on me."

"Thanks. I work in a bakery myself, but it's nothing like this," she informed him. "All our stuff looks alike, tastes alike, and is alike. We have stores all over the city. Milford's. Maybe

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you heard of them? No? They pay lousy money, but I like the kids that work there, so I don't mind."

In the coffee shop they sat at a round glass-topped table that might have been lifted from a gay-nineties ice-cream parlor. Again as he looked at Pat, Adam was dogged by wonder that she could have reminded him of any of the three women he had known intimately. There was no trace of Margaret's jitters, Vicki's heavy paleness. Neither in color nor in shape did she in any way resemble Allegra. Her eyes, perhaps, held a certain young wisdom that Allegra's eyes had held. But in Allegra there had been such bitterness. . . .

"How long have you been at Mrs. Simms's?" Pat asked.

"Who?"

"Mrs. Simms. That's our landlady. You mean you didn't even know her name? You in a daze or something, kid?"

"It must be the big city." His mouth twisted.

"Probably. What's your name, anyway?"

"Adam. Yours is Pat."

"Sure it isn't Vicki?"

"I heard the landlady call you to the phone." He flushed darkly, wishing he could bite off his tongue, wondering if she would think he was one of those, one who listened, watched, spied! Oh, he knew about them! But Pat hadn't seemed to notice any slip.

"What's your last name?" she asked.

"Wenn."

"Adam Wenn." There was a lighted candlelabrum on the wall, and as she cocked her head, the light flickered across her hair, all angles and shadows. "Did you ever notice a name will give you a picture of someone? Of course, everything's a picture to me." She gave a deprecatory little laugh. "Can you imagine me wanting to study art, once? Me?"

He lowered his glance quickly, afraid she might see the sharp stab of memory this evoked. Allegra, too, had wanted to study art—once.

"I always wished I could draw," he said. "But I flunked

major art three times." Anything, any meaningless words would do, to chase the recollection away. "It was mostly my prof, I think. I can see him now. He was one of those owl-faced guys with horn-rimmed glasses."

"I've seen the type."

"And he only went for kids with horn-rimmed glasses and round faces. You won't believe this, but his name was Dr. Horn."

"You're kidding."

"I'm not. Dr. Ernest Horn."

Now she laughed aloud, the curve of her mouth dispersing the tough-little-boy impression. No doubt this was an illusion, carefully preserved like the hardening of her glance when she thought he was observing her. He was surprised by his own lucidity in analyzing a girl he hardly knew, and it suddenly made him feel bold and expansive.

"Once the professor watched me sketch a model and he said: 'I can see that as an artist, you'd make a fine chef, Henlein. I've never seen such a salad.'" Something like that had actually happened once, in high school.

Pat frowned at him.

"But why did he call you Henlein? I though you said your name was Wenn."

"I didn't say Henlein." He felt warning hairs begin to bristle on his neck. "I said Wenn."

"You did not. You said—"

"I said Wenn!"

He snatched a menu and held it in front of his face. He could feel his pulse pounding. Who was she? What kind of a trap had he walked into? He had said Wenn, not Henlein. Somehow she had known about Henlein, had been waiting for him to make a slip, and then—

His thoughts were cut short by the appearance of a waiter. With hands that still trembled, Adam lowered the menu and looked across at the girl on the other side of the table. She stared back with remote, unsmiling eyes. Doubt flooded him. Had he really slipped, said Henlein?

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"What'll you have?" he asked in a low voice.

"Coffee and some sort of pastry."

His doubt became a certainty. He must have said Henlein. She had not been probing. She was just what she appeared to be, a kid in blue jeans and a ridiculous homemade haircut, who lived in a rooming house like a thousand other rooming houses in the jumble of the city.

He gave the waiter their order, then faced her.

"Listen, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I blew up that way. I've been kind of jumpy."

She listened, offering no quarter, and he told the first lie that came to him.

"I've been job-hunting. I don't know if you have any idea what it's like, but it's miserable."

"I guess it is." The searching gaze was still on him. Then all at once she gave in, her eyes softening. "I know it's tough in the beginning. I've had some hard times myself. Try to think of things the right way, though. You can't fail. Just keep reminding yourself. You can't fail, see?"

Adam nodded, and looked down at his hands. He remembered vaguely that earlier in the evening he had considered her almost sophisticated. Now he wanted to laugh. How easy it had been to check her suspicions! He thought of Allegra, of her fiery displeasures, of the battles he had undertaken to woo her out of them. Allegra. Something twisted inside of him, but he tore himself once more from the thought of her. *You can't fail.* He felt the corners of his mouth twitching. Poor little homemade philosophy, little homemade haircut, thinking she was telling him something profound. Something deep and thought-out and useful. Nothing could have pointed out more clearly just what this girl was. A kid from New York, brought up on its crusty, dusty, hard-knocks surface. A typical product. There were a million of her.

The waiter came and she chose an éclair. Adam waved the sweets away and sipped his coffee.

"Look," Pat said, "I don't know about the job. What do you say we go Dutch treat?"

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He looked at her, feeling a kind of pitying indulgence.

"I can afford it. Go ahead, enjoy it."

She shrugged. "You're the boss."

Allegra swam back into his thoughts. Allegra's perfect lady-like finesse. Allegra would have found a far more subtle way to mention a man's pocketbook on a social occasion. There were vast worlds between the two girls. Worlds. All the speculation suddenly made him feel nervous and acted as a spur, made him want to talk.

"As a matter of fact," he said, his voice rapid, "I have nothing to worry about. I don't know why I let the job bother me. My father sends me as much money as I need. All I want. I just have to ask him. That's all I have to do. Ask him."

"You're lucky," she said.

It was while they walked back to the rooming house later that Adam realized that practically everything he had said to her tonight had been untrue. It struck him with sudden clarity, as if this were the only truth, and the rest of his life were a dream, or a deep sleep, time that he must make pass in some way, any way he could. Then the moment was lost and he was back in the tangle of deceit, of lies, of running away, of hiding, of fear, of his own inner knowledge of the bleak balance in which his very life hung.

He glanced at the girl who walked beside him. She walked quietly, her hands in the front pockets of her jeans, shoulders slightly hunched. There was something hard, proud, and a little lonely, about her figure. About the absurd, upspringing hair. It stirred something in Adam, like a poker stirring at the ashes of his weariness. In that moment he had his first thought for her instead of for himself. For the possibility of her own need and desire, her own will to warmth and close comfort. With no other thought, he reached for her arm, pulled it toward him, and closed his fingers about her wrist.

She gave him a quick look.

"What's that for, kid?"

He didn't reply. He permitted a momentary image to in-

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vade his mind. The fantasy he had had of her, reaching forth to touch his mouth with her hand. "You have a flake of tobacco . . ." Her eyes looking up at him gravely, cleanly, with no hypocrisy, no suspicion in her nasty little New York gutter-kid mind. But that had been a dream, A dream, he knew now, of another girl. For he still dreamed of Allegra. Allegra.

He flung Pat's hand away without a word, setting his face straight ahead and quickening his step. She was obliged to hurry.

"What got into you, kid?" Her voice was half-laughing. "Wait a minute. Don't be so touchy!"

He walked faster.

"No, you wait a minute." She caught at his arm angrily, halting him in his tracks. "What in hell is wrong with you?"

"Wrong?"

"You heard me."

"Maybe something's wrong with you, not me."

"Such as—?"

"Maybe you don't kiss boys on your first date. Is that it?"

She looked startled.

"I never said that. What brought that up?"

"You mean you do? What else do you do?"

She snatched her hand away, as though she had been burned. Rage flared across her face, and the freckles stood out like ugly little blotches.

"I might have known!" She almost spat the words at him. "Always the same filthy stuff from drunks, bums, and assorted scum like yourself! It starts out nice and cool and ends up with the words you read on fences and subway posters! Buster, you better take off. Mr. Wenn, or Mr. Henlein, or whatever your name is. And if you ever make a pass at me again, my brother'll cut you up for mincemeat!"

Her words sank into him like things going down into a black pool, unknown things that turned slowly round and round as they sank. As he stood there, he saw her turn furiously and start off down the street alone.

He whispered: "Go ahead, goddam you." Like Vince, like

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Vince cursing after Margaret. The thought did not surprise him, but served to emphasize what he had already learned in his relationship with Allegra. All men and women, he had learned, were likely to end up as Margaret and Vince had. All women turned down the best a man could offer, and left him frenzied and frustrated.

He stood there for another minute, like a stranger who had come upon a small scene on an unknown street. He watched with a queer sense of detachment as Pat turned the corner and disappeared. So many times Vince must have stood, feeling himself a stranger, watching Margaret slip away from him into an unknown night.

Alone, Adam walked toward home, entered the house, and climbed the stairs to his room. As he locked his door he began to hum to himself. But the sound was remote, as though someone else were humming, someone unseen on the other side of the wall. He turned to his bed and walked across to it, protected by the tall brooding mists of his other world.

X

HE RANG the doorbell at a quarter after eleven, and Mrs. Bussie let him in, frowning.

"You're fifteen minutes late."

"I know all about it."

"All right, Mr. Snippetty." She shrugged. "I can hold my tongue. Doctor'll fix you if you've got it coming."

He brushed past her to the closed door of the office. He stood there for a second before knocking, trying to remember what he had intended to say about coming late. He cursed Mrs. Bussie angrily. He had had a perfectly good excuse prepared and she had driven it out of his head.

He knocked and entered the office.

"Hello, Adam."

"I'm late."

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"Yes, I know." While he stood waiting, she said: "Aren't you going to sit down today?"

He crossed the rug and sat down in the chair facing the window. The sun had warmed the upholstery. It felt like the warmth of another body left behind in the chair. How many others had sat in this chair, he thought, and poured out their lives, their soiled, spoiled, insignificant lives? Like so much dirty water emptied out of a scrub pail.

He stared down at his shoes. A wave of hopelessness washed over him. He had nothing to say to her. He didn't know why he had come.

"Did you have a pleasant weekend, Adam?"

He gave her a bitter look. "Are murderers supposed to have pleasant weekends?"

She made no reply and his eyes went back to the tips of his shoes. They were newly shined and they caught the light and began to dazzle. The silence grew, deepening. He felt his jaw set. He could be quiet as long as she. He stared at his shoes.

"This isn't a contest, you know." He jerked his head up, not only at the unexpectedness of her remark, but at the almost humorous tone. He had taken it for granted that she felt a hostility as keen as his own. "This happens sometimes," she said. "Remember last week I told you there might be times when you'd have nothing to say. But let's try anyway. Suppose you tell me why you were late."

"I don't know."

"Did you oversleep?"

"No. I got up at eight o'clock. I tried to go back to sleep, but I couldn't." He hesitated. "I had one of those gruesome dreams, and I thought if I went back to sleep I might forget about it. I suppose you want me to tell you when I dream. I mean all about what happens in my dreams."

"I do."

"Even if I'm sure they don't mean anything?"

"Even then," she said. "Sometimes with a little help you may find meanings you didn't know existed."

"I don't think my dreams are like that," Adam replied. "I

bought a book once that explained over a thousand dream symbols, and mine didn't make any sense."

"Well, tell me about your dream last night anyway."

"It—" He stopped. His lips were suddenly dry, and he had to wet them with his tongue. He didn't know where to begin. Oddly enough, a moment before, the entire dream had flashed through his mind and now it was gone. He looked at Dr. Kiraly dumbly. It was strange. He knew the dream so well. It was a dream he had frequently had.

"It's—I dream it all the time."

"Yes?"

Suddenly it came back to him. The beach. The gray sand beach, endless. There were trees, things shaped like trees, gray too. "Like hanging sand," he said.

The beach sloped down sharply, and he walked toward the slope beneath the hanging vinelike masses of the trees. A path opened before him. And then it widened, and he found himself sliding helplessly down the incline. He grasped at the gray sand, but it came away in his hands and dribbled through his fingers. Water lay below him. It moved slowly up toward him. He knew that he would drown. He saw that there were other people crawling up the slope away from the edge of the water, and some of them made it easily. He called to them for help, shouted after them. One figure turned to come to his rescue—a tall white shrouded figure—but the water came more quickly as though to claim him before help arrived. And the figure just reached forward and touched him, then drew back. That was all. Agonized, he shouted for help. Again and again. He felt the water lapping at his feet, closing over his ankles, felt himself slipping down, drowning.

And then, sobbing to himself, he always awoke.

He sat now with whitened knuckles pressed into the palm of his hand. He was shaken at the reality of the dream.

"I shouldn't have said it's always the same dream," he said. "Sometimes it isn't a beach. It's a cave."

"And the water?"

"The water creeps in at the front of the cave. The other peo-

ple crawl out of a hole at the back. You have to crawl through this place. It's terribly narrow and it winds around, so that you don't even know if there's really a way out at the other end. Somebody calls me in the cave dream and tells me there's a way out. But I never get out."

"Who calls you?"

"I don't know."

"The same person as the tall white figure, perhaps? The figure who almost rescues you in the dream about the beach?"

"I don't know," he said tensely. "I told you it was just one of those dreams that don't mean anything."

"Well, let's try anyway, shall we, Adam?"

"All right."

"In this recurrent dream, have you ever been rescued?"

"No. Only almost." His brows drew together, emphasizing his look of a young hawk. "I think years ago when the dream started, there wasn't even anyone who tried to rescue me. Or any voice calling me."

"You simply drowned?"

"Well, but I always woke up."

"Yes, of course." She wrote something briefly on her desk pad and sat back. "Do you recall any other dreams?"

"No." He watched her face. "This one has no meaning at all, has it?"

"I think it will, when we've had time to examine it in relation to other things you haven't told me yet. Single incidents are important, Adam, but, after all, each of us is the result of many, many forces. The incidents will fall into place more easily when we have the whole life picture."

"Even dreams?"

"Yes." When his eyes still showed doubt, she said: "If a physician in a laboratory found that a certain serum cured rheumatism in nine hundred out of a thousand patients, Adam, would you consider it proof of the serum's validity?"

"Of course. Anybody would."

"Very well. Let's keep it on a laboratory basis. Suppose that a psychiatrist has had a thousand patients, each of whom ad-

mits a strong desire to murder his mother. Nine hundred of them dream constantly of burning down a house. A new patient appears and tells the psychiatrist he always dreams of burning down a house. Would you consider it logical if the psychiatrist concluded that the new patient might be considering the murder of his mother?"

"You mean that's how they figure out what dreams mean?"

"Very much like that, Adam. It isn't quite the voodoo some people believe. As you can see, it is just as scientific as any theory which has been laboratory-tested."

"Was my dream like that? I mean, was it a dream a lot of people might have—if they were like me?"

"Very possibly. We'll discuss it one day soon, Adam. But now tell me about the weekend."

He gazed down at his shoes again.

"I met the girl on the stairs."

"Oh? Did you speak to her?"

"Yes. We had some coffee together." After a moment he shrugged. "I don't know why I bothered with her. I was curious, I guess. She didn't turn out to be anything like I expected."

"What *did* you expect?"

He made a vague gesture.

"Does she still remind you of Vicki?"

"God, no."

"Or Margaret?"

He thought this over.

"She did for a minute. Toward the end. When she—she wasn't what she seemed to be. She was just like all the rest. It wasn't so much that she reminded me of Margaret. It was—she made me feel like my father. Like he must have felt about my mother. But then—so did Allegra." Restlessness filled him, and this time it was he who glanced at his watch. The gold watch with the slender rubies for numerals, one of the few things that had not been lost with the possessions in his suitcase. "It's time for me to go, isn't it?"

"Yes. It's just noon. See you tomorrow, Adam."

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He felt that the week that followed was totally unproductive. The volubility of the first sessions—which amazed and embarrassed him in retrospect—vanished. Now he sat mutely facing Dr. Kiraly, wishing that he had never come, yet doggedly returning each day. When she prompted him, he dragged forth small incidents of his life, all totally isolated from each other, or so it seemed to him. Thursday and Friday, because he came late, they had only half-hour visits. On Thursday he forgot his wallet and had to return to his room for carfare. Friday, deep in thought, he got off the bus at the wrong street, and kept walking block after block expecting at any moment to reach her house.

Both times, though she regarded him with level eyes, he had a feeling she had not really accepted his excuses. He had wanted to challenge her, angry and baffled because he knew he had told the truth.

"You don't seem to believe me," he said at last, offended.

"Oh, I believe you, Adam."

"Well, what is it, then?"

"I believe you forgot your wallet and I believe you got off at the wrong street. But you might re-examine your motives for these mistakes."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, once in a while I've had a patient who forgot the address or who walked into the wrong house and couldn't find my apartment. The question is, why do these things happen?"

"That has nothing to do with me. That wasn't me."

"No, but yesterday for example, when you forgot your money. That's rather unusual, isn't it? Has it ever happened to you before?"

"No, but it could happen."

"True. And today you got off at the wrong street, you say."

"I don't say," he flared. "I did."

"Sorry. You got off at the wrong street. But why did you keep walking so many blocks out of your way when you knew perfectly well my house was half a block away from the bus stop?"

He was silent.

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"Do you think perhaps you didn't want to come here?"

"I know I didn't want to come." He gave a brief laugh. "Why should I want to come here? It certainly isn't getting anyone any place."

"You don't have much faith in this treatment, do you, Adam?"

"Faith? Why should I have faith in anything? I'll have faith when somebody proves something to me."

She smiled.

"In other words, if I were to perform some psychoanalytical miracle for you, it would be different. Is that it?"

"I don't want any miracles," he said roughly. "I just want some results. You couldn't even tell me what a silly dream meant."

She toyed for a moment with the pencil on her desk, then met his waiting eyes.

"I can probably tell you a great deal about that dream and its meaning, Adam. In fact, I think I will. I'm not sure whether you'll be ready to accept my interpretation or reject it. But we'll see." She leaned forward, her face very serious, so that he was impressed even before she spoke, by the realization that she implicitly believed what she was saying to him. "You told me that in your earlier dreams there was no possibility of rescue in sight—that is, there was no one, nothing, that even suggested rescue to you. Is that correct? You were simply left to drown."

"That's right."

"And lately—how lately is it, by the way?—do you know?—a possibility of rescue has entered your dreams."

"Oh, the last couple of years, maybe. I don't really know." He watched her intently now, his eyes dark with an inner excitement that he tried to hide. "And anyway, I still haven't actually been rescued in any of the dreams."

"I know. But you are now aware of the possibility of rescue, aren't you?" As he stared at her, she said: "Can't you remember when this change first took place, Adam? Was it, by

any chance, at the time you realized you might need the help of a psychiatrist?"

"No. I didn't think of that till I was on the train coming from California."

"And you don't remember that it even flickered through your mind at any other time? The time, for example, when the boy who mentioned me discussed analysis? Did you have any thought of it then?"

"For myself, no."

"Well, anyway," she persisted, "can you think back to that time and tell me whether the dreams changed before or after your discussion with this boy?"

"I don't know," he said flatly.

"Perhaps I'm on the wrong track. Or more likely it's something we'll know more about later on."

"Wait a minute," Adam said. "I don't want to keep putting it off, whatever it is. I don't want to drop it again. That stuff about the change in the dream—you mean you think the change means something?"

She hesitated.

"Even if it's hard to put in my kind of language," he said urgently now, "maybe you could explain it so I'd understand part of it."

"We'll try, Adam. You mentioned that as a young child, you felt you were living in two worlds, a real world and a shadow world. Like any other shadow, your shadow world could change in shape or size, but no matter how minute the connection to the real world, it always did connect—at least during the period you described, which brought us up to the age of about seven. Do you follow me up to this point?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think that at some time, perhaps not too much later, the shadow world may have broken away completely from the real one. For a time your two worlds may have been quite separate and apart. You lived in both of them, yet were quite unable to achieve any integration between the two—

between fantasy and reality, between danger and rescue. Your dreams indicated a subconscious awareness that you had floundered into a danger from which no rescue seemed possible. Then all at once, at a still later point in your life, you began to sense that there might be some sort of help in sight, after all. The figure who came to your aid could very well have been a doctor. Doctors often wear long white coverings, don't they? Perhaps you thought of coming to see me long before you were ready to admit it, even to yourself."

His mouth was taut, his eyes staring hungrily into hers. With everything in him, he strained to grasp what she was saying. He knew that it was one of the most important things that had ever been said to him. It was like an arrow pointing—where?

His hands came up slowly and rubbed his temples.

"I don't know," he said. "I just don't know."

"I won't pursue it for now. It's been a lot to absorb in one sitting." Again her voice was gentle. "Just let me point out something I feel is very important. In your present dreams the solution may still seem beyond your reach. But it isn't, Adam. The hand of the rescuer only touches you now, but one day if you stick with your analysis, no matter how tough it gets, I promise you that the hand will grasp yours and pull you firmly back to shore."

Later, going down in the elevator, he thought: *She promised me.* He thought of all the promises made to him during his life that had not been kept, or that had been kept at the cost of some other betrayal.

His lips tightened as he stepped out into the street. She really thought they would get somewhere, he realized. But where? Where can a murderer get? What did he really want from her? Why had he not simply buried himself in some secret place, to live out his secret life as other fugitives did? When he considered it logically, what kind of help could she really give him?

He might turn out to be a well-adjusted killer, he thought bitterly.

He turned the corner and took out his handkerchief to wipe his forehead. It was getting very warm now. It was nearly summer.

XI

Now, as in that transient childhood summer, the days seemed to leap past like sheets of colored paper flipped through by a thumb. There were days of pale yellow and days that merged from mauve to gray to black. They came back—the light times and the dark times. . . . Again, over them all, hung a sense of waiting, waiting in a still place for the renewed howling of the wind.

The weeks moved into a month. The sound of his own voice, sometimes stumbling, sometimes almost incoherent, became the focal point of his existence. He had not known there were so many things stored behind the floodgates of his twenty-two years.

"Why can't it just pour out?" Adam said to Dr. Kiraly once. "Sometimes I feel as if I'm trying to—to empty the Pacific with a dipper."

"We may be approaching something that's difficult to talk about, Adam. But it will come."

Now the present began to intrude upon him. His money had dwindled and the luxury of dwelling on the past became tinged with the necessities of the future.

"Another week, another thirty-seven fifty," Adam said in a clipped voice to Dr. Kiraly.

"Yes. I must say your two hundred dollars has held out very well, hasn't it?"

"You know I had more than that."

He had become used to the fact that she always knew a great deal that he had not told her, or about which he had lied. When she had caught him this way in the beginning, it had evoked swift anger, and he had fought her with every sly trick. Now he merely smiled.

I AM ADAM

"As a matter of fact, I had about five hundred left when I reached New York. And even that is just about gone. I didn't tell you the truth about it because I knew you'd charge me too much."

"You think I charge you too much anyway, don't you, Adam?"

"Yes."

"How much do you think I ought to charge you?"

"Well, an ordinary doctor only charges about five dollars, and sometimes that includes drugs and things. Even penicillin." He had considered it before this, in fact it had smoldered inside him, but he doubted that he would have brought it up by himself. "And doctors have to pay for a nurse, besides."

"That's all very true. Incidentally, do you have any idea how many patients an ordinary doctor can handle during the course of a day?"

He shrugged.

"According to a number of general practitioners I have known, the average is something like twenty-five patients a day. Against an average of six or seven patients for the psychoanalyst."

He gave her a withdrawn smile.

"I knew you'd have an answer for it. I may as well admit one thing. Sometimes I like you and sometimes I can't stand you, but I always think you're pretty smart."

"Thank you."

"Why should I like you or not like you?" He was staring out of the window now. "It isn't as if you're anything personal in my life. You're more like a kind of sounding-board. I don't know why I can't just sit home and talk things out to the wall."

"Perhaps you like an answer once in a while."

"I'd drop dead if you gave me one. Just once."

"It isn't my job to give you the answers outright, Adam. I can only help you to give them to yourself."

"Oh." He let out a snort. "Is that what we're supposed to be doing?"

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"That is what we are doing."

"Is it?" He had meant to sound humorous, but his voice held a half-note of desperation. He tried again to lighten it. "Are you sure?"

"I'm very sure. Now let's see. Where were we yesterday, Adam? It seems to me you always bring up the subject of Edmond and Margaret just as our time is up. Suppose you tell me about them now."

"Edmond?" His voice dragged. He knew that he had been hedging, but now he was aware of it when it happened and knew all sorts of tricks to make the hour pass with a minimum of effort. He didn't know why he fought it this way at times. He supposed he was tired of all the digging, of straining his brain to remember small unimportant details. The life he had laid out before her might have been the life of some other boy, a boy he had known intimately but had certainly never been. He could not think of that other Adam as anything but a kid brother, and it was almost indecent to dare to strip him so naked without giving him a chance to defend himself.

He shook off the thought.

"In a way," he began, his voice still reluctant, "Margaret was happier with Edmond." He had learned this technique of prying open the floodgates an inch at a time. Make a statement, then examine it. Pull it apart, refute it, deny it, prove it. Portray it to her as it had really been, not all colored by later events. "Everyone had his own idea about why she married Edmond. Vicki said it was so nobody would think Vince could find a wife and she couldn't find a husband. And Vince—I remember he said it was because Edmond had everything she wanted—money."

"And you. What did you think?"

"I'm not sure. I was such a mixed-up kid. There were so many changes for Jeremy and me. You know, Edmond went out of his way to be nice to us at first. He never came to the house without all kinds of junk for us. Toys, sports stuff—all that. I realized later it was just his way of being good to us in the beginning. Giving us a chance to prove we were

I AM ADAM

good kids, grateful. He used to enjoy thinking about doing things for people. Giving things away. I guess he figured we were poor little orphan kids he'd give a good home to. Or something like that. It's hard to explain. He was good to people till they did something he didn't think was right. Or grateful enough. I—something happened once that will sound stupid, but it was just the kind of thing Edmond did. He used to clean all the bones off our plates after dinner and take them over to our next-door neighbor for the dog. I remember he'd go around scraping off the plates and humming to himself, with his pleased face on because he was going to give something to somebody. Then one day the man told him he didn't think the bones were good for the dog. Said he better not bring them over any more. Edmond didn't say anything, just took the bones and brought them home and dumped them into the garbage pail. After that he wouldn't have anything to do with the man next door. He started finding all sorts of things wrong with him. Finally he had the poor guy hauled into court on some kind of zoning law—without letting him know who'd reported it, of course. Anyway, the man had to dig up his whole garden and change his fence around, and this is the part that's so typical of Edmond. He brushed off his hands once it was all done and looked perfectly satisfied—like God again. And he was perfectly friendly with the neighbor afterwards. Jesus, he even sympathized with him about having had to pull the whole garden up."

He stopped talking, aware that the angry excitement had entered his voice, and that unless he checked it quickly, it could grow, leap alive, get out of bounds. That mustn't happen, or she would think—

What would she think? He glanced at Dr. Kiraly, met her cool, waiting eyes, and straightened his body in the chair.

"That's the way Edmond was with us," he said, keeping his voice steady, controlling it. "As long as he saw to it that we paid properly for our crimes, we were friends. But he could never rest until he'd done his duty." It was better now; he was back on the track. "You remember a few weeks ago I told you

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what Vicki said? That Edmond was always overcompensating for a secret doubt?"

"Yes. I remember very well."

"Well, I think that was what she meant. Maybe he gave things away because he was getting them dishonestly, even though he kept saying graft was part of his job. Maybe secretly he wanted to make up for it. I suppose that means he wasn't all bad, doesn't it? At least he had a conscience. What are you smiling about?"

"I'm rather pleased. You saw everything so black and white when you first came here. In a remarkably short time, you've started to see some of the in-between tones—the gray ones."

"The gray ones," Adam said slowly. "I guess everybody has more than the black and white. Even Edmond."

He had watched Edmond very closely in the beginning, simply obeying a compulsion to observe him, to measure him, to study every feature of his face and every change of expression. As a fighter might study an adversary in the ring, storing away bits of information for future use.

Edmond was a big man, even taller than Vince and far broader. There was no trace of Vince's boyish thinness. Edmond's was a solid, tight-knit body, which was merely larger than most. He enjoyed his bigness, carried it with pride. The new house—they had moved from the bungalow in Inglewood to a split-level house in Beverly Hills after Margaret remarried—was furnished mostly in proportion to Edmond's size. The bathtub in the master bath was so large, the twins might have gone swimming in it.

Margaret seemed too small for the house, lost under the huge ceilings, sunk almost out of sight on the enormous sofa. She had a way of walking through the house in a strange, intent trance, touching various objects with her hands as if to reassure herself they were really there, and hers. Edmond had bought the house for them and had made one improvement. There was a pickled-pine bar built along one wall of the living-room. In the afternoons, even if there was no one to keep her

I AM ADAM

company, Margaret would climb up on one of the tall red leather stools and stare at herself in the mirror as she sipped a Martini, pointed high heels looped over the brass railing on the bottom of the bar. The bar, too, had been built to Edmond's specifications, and the stools were several inches taller than ordinary stools.

Once when Cheryl came to visit them and marveled over their new house, Margaret looked at her a little blankly and said: "Do you like it? Good. Of course, I think it's perfect. Just wonderful. . . ." Her voice trailed off, then came again in a little rush that sounded almost frightened. "Cheryl, it's such a big house, isn't it? I mean—even Ernestine, that's the maid, she seems the right size for this house. She's a great big woman, did you notice? It's almost more like her house, hers and Ed's." She gave a funny little giggle, like a hiccup. "What a perfect fool I am to talk this way, Cheryl! It's just that sometimes I feel like Alice in Wonderland. Remember the part where she gets so small she can lean against a buttercup?"

Now the twins had rooms of their own, two adjoining rooms that led out to a small upstairs terrace at the side of the house. There was a yellow-and-white striped awning that could be unwound by a handle to cover the terrace in hot weather. From the first, there were arguments about who would wind the handle.

"You can wind it down and I can wind it up," Adam offered.

"Oh, no. If you want to wind it at all you have to ask me first. The handle is on my side of the terrace."

"The terrace is all everybody's," Adam insisted. "Edmond said."

"He did not. He said this one was for us. They've got the big one downstairs. That's the one that's all everybody's, not this one. And the handle is on my side, and you better not touch it."

"Oh, yes I will."

"No, you won't!"

Adam smiled and busied himself with his own game. He had a small wooden bench and chair. In the top of the bench

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were holes of various shapes and sizes, into which the proper pegs could be hammered. He had had it for two years, refusing to leave it behind when they had moved. He could sit for hours hammering the pegs into their holes, turning the bench upside down and hammering them out again. Jeremy scornfully referred to the bench as Adam's "baby toy," and Margaret herself had tried to part him from it. But Adam had held on to it, and now he sat hammering, turning the bench over, hammering again, while Jeremy watched with discontented eyes.

"You won't touch that handle. It's my handle."

Adam hammered.

"You hear me?"

"I'll touch it."

"You won't!" Jeremy screamed. "You won't, you hear me? You won't!"

"Yes, I will."

Jeremy stamped his foot, then threw himself across the room and grasped at the bench. Before Adam could rescue it, Jeremy had run out to the terrace and flung it over the railing.

There was a shout from below.

"Now," Adam said, "you'll get it."

"I won't get it. You did it."

"I did not!"

"It's yours. Everybody knows it's yours. I haven't any old baby toy."

"But I'll tell them you did it."

"I'll tell Vince you tattled!"

Adam opened his mouth, then closed it again. There were footsteps coming up the stairs, and they stood facing the open door, waiting. Edmond burst in on them, the bench in his hand.

"Who did this?"

"It's Adam's."

Edmond turned to Adam, his voice harsh.

"Why did you throw this over the railing, Adam?"

Adam stared at him, saying nothing.

"Do you know you might have killed someone? That a min-

I AM ADAM

ute ago the man from Rancho Gardens was planting begonias on that very spot? That would have been nice, wouldn't it, Adam, if your toy struck Mr. Rothbart after he gave you a ride in his nursery truck this morning?" He waited, but there was no sound from the room. "This is one of your favorite toys, isn't it, Adam?"

There was no answer.

"If that's the way you treat a favorite toy, I don't think you deserve to have it."

Very deliberately, Edmond placed the bench on the floor. The size of his hand made the bench look very small and somehow defenseless. Adam felt his whole body tighten. He met Edmond's eyes, yellow-brown eyes that never left his face, even as Edmond's foot came down and crashed over the bench. A thrill of horror wrenched through Adam as he watched, then turned to triumph, for one or two of the pegs flew about, but the bench was unscathed. Edmond raised his foot again and, with the same deliberate gesture, brought it down. But Adam stood staunch, knowing no one, not even Edmond, could break the little bench. There was a splintering sound and the bench collapsed. Adam stared at it, blinking.

"It broke."

"Yes." Edmond's breath came quickly. "I'm sorry I had to do that, Adam. But you had to learn your lesson."

He brushed his hands together and turned and walked out of the room. The bench lay mute and splintered. Behind Adam, there was a sudden sob.

Edmond's big bulk came swiftly back into the room. He went to Adam, bent over him, a look of forgiveness, of indulgence, on his face.

"Don't cry. It's nothing to cry about, Adam. It's all over now and I know you'll never again—"

Adam drew back fiercely.

"I'm not crying. Jeremy is crying."

"Jeremy?" Edmond straightened, his voice puzzled. "Why are you crying, Jeremy?"

Jeremy turned and rushed into his own room.

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Edmond started after him, then stopped. A dark, perplexed look crossed his face. He turned to Adam, but Adam looked rigidly back at him. Finally, with an abrupt twist, his stepfather left the room. Adam stood motionless. Something had crept into his throat, big and hurting. Bigger than the splintered bench, bigger than anger. He had tasted anger before, and loss, and disappointment. But he had never tasted this before. This was the first taste of his brother's betrayal.

They still spent nearly every weekend with Vince. He and Vicki had two places to live, the house in Los Pepinos and a three-room apartment not far from Beverly Hills, convenient to Vince's office. It was a small store-front office on La Brea Avenue, with a gold-lettered sign on the window, bearing the name of Vincent Henlein under the name of the company. On their most recent visit they had found Vicki sitting at the typewriter, her fingers moving awkwardly over the keys.

"Where's the girl that used to type?" Jeremy demanded.

"She doesn't work here any more," Vince said.

"She typed faster than Vicki," Jeremy observed. "Her fingers went as fast as pinwheels. You couldn't even see them."

"Or airplane propellers," said Adam.

"Well," Vicki said, glancing at Vince and laughing, "the amount of typing we have these days, it doesn't matter whether I make like a pinwheel or not." Adam saw the startled look that always crossed his father's face when she talked to them like grown-ups. "Business was bad and Vince couldn't afford a secretary. So I'm learning to type." She pulled the paper from her machine. "Listen, boys, it's Saturday. Let's close up and drive out to the house."

Vince no longer had the black sedan the company had bought him in New York. Now he and Vicki both used the rickety tan convertible that she had owned before they were married. Edmond had a convertible too, a shiny new black Buick, twice the size of Vicki's, with beige leather upholstery. The boys were proud of Edmond's car, particularly when he drove them to school mornings, and the other kids gathered

I AM ADAM

around admiringly. Yet whenever they spoke of "our car" a moment of confusion ensued for Adam. He felt almost guilty. Which car was really theirs, Edmond's or Vicki's?

For that matter, he pondered, which of everything was really theirs? Which house, which room, which set of toys? Were the second-hand bicycles at Los Pepinos any less theirs than the shiny new ones in the garage in Beverly Hills? "We have four bikes," Adam would say to himself. But this did not really satisfy him. Nor was it correct, somehow, to say: "We have two cars." He had tried hard to find the proper formula, and at last pushed the problem violently away from him. It was like the time Vicki had said there was no end to space. He had lain awake that night, trying almost feverishly to grasp the elusive truth. He had twisted in his bed, feeling the edges of comprehension touching his mind, then sliding away, tantalizing him. Now he simply refused to consider the infiniteness of space, filled with strange stars, reaching out forever and ever and ever. For it was nothing but a trap. In much the same way, he pushed away the puzzle of their dual existence, merely accepting that it was so.

When summer came again, he was forced to think about it. Edmond and Margaret joined the club at the end of June—the same club the Commissioner belonged to, Edmond was fond of saying—and took out junior memberships for the twins. This entitled them to golf and tennis lessons, and the club's swimming facilities.

"There's only one thing," Edmond remarked as they drove to the club to sign for their cards, "I'd prefer it if we all use the name Wenn at the club. It'll be far less complicated if my family has one name."

Adam saw his mother turn swiftly to Edmond. In a low voice she said: "I don't think we can do that, Ed. According to the agreement, unless I have Vince's written permission, I can't change their names."

"Don't be ridiculous, Meg. This isn't anything legal. It'll

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just be at the club, for the summer. Anyway, he'd better not start anything about that agreement. He only cares about his kids when it comes to his visitation rights, not when it comes to supporting them."

"The insurance business has been pretty slow, Ed."

"I don't care. If he were any kind of man he'd manage to support his own children. I suppose he figures I'm footing the bills now, why should he worry?" They stopped for a traffic light and Edmond's voice carried clearly to Adam and Jeremy in the back seat. "She's got some kind of property upstate, hasn't she? His wife? If they're so broke, why don't they sell that?"

"Darling, really!" Margaret gave a brief laugh. "You don't know Vicki if you think she'd sell anything to support my children!"

"Then why worry about a little thing like changing their names just for the summer?"

The car started again and the rest of their conversation was lost. Adam stared at the back of Edmond's head. The neck was broad and sunburned, and his hair lay in tight brown curls against his skull. *He is not my father*, Adam thought stonily, *my name is Adam Henlein*.

Yet when the moment came, he did not speak.

He sat beside Jeremy on a woven peel chair in the club office. It was a huge room with a redwood balcony that jutted out toward the pool. Below them people in bright bathing attire splashed in the water or lounged on striped mats. Occasionally a waiter appeared with a tray of drinks, and a genteel clinking of ice could be heard between the splashes in the pool.

Adam turned to the woman who sat behind the modern oak desk in the club office. She was filling in their cards, saying to Edmond: "And the boys' names?"

"Adam. And Jeremy."

She wrote in the names and handed Edmond the cards.

"There you are. Your official welcome to Redwood. If there's anything you wish, I'm here at my desk almost all the time.

I AM ADAM

Though you'll find all our employees eager to help you at all times. But for any special information, just pick up one of the club phones and ask for me. Mrs. Butler. Ruth Butler."

"We've been here before. With the Commissioner. We know the club well." Edmond studied the cards a moment, then handed them around. "I suggest you boys carry them in your wallets. They make fine identification cards."

With an air of importance, Jeremy slid his card into the wallet Vince had given him for Christmas. Adam held his card silently.

"What's the matter, darling?" There was a tentative note to Margaret's voice.

Adam looked up at her.

"What's the matter?" she repeated. Two flushed spots appeared on her cheeks, and her voice became low and angry. "Put your card in your wallet the way Jeremy did."

"Do as your mother says, Adam."

Adam put the card in his pocket. He would not put it in Vince's wallet. It had the wrong name on it for Vince's wallet. It said *Adam Wenn*.

XII

NOW HE could look back upon that summer as a man might watch some distant holocaust. A man standing on the shore, watching the destruction of a city across a river, a city in which he once lived and for which he still feels an uncertain attachment. Buildings exploding against the sky, and tiny doll-like figures flung into the air. . . .

Real, yet unreal. That precarious summer.

"He can't see them, that's all, Meg."

"But, Ed—"

"Let me handle this, Meg. He's gotten away with a hell of a lot already. He hasn't sent you a check in a month."

"Oh, you're right, of course. Still—"

"He isn't going to get away with it any longer."

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The twins were told to play up on the terrace and to remain there. Through the railing, across the white begonia lawn, they glimpsed Vicki's rickety tan car, heard it in front of the house, and chugging sound that always made them laugh. Downstairs, a minute later, were voices, routine voices. Vince and Edmond. Then silence. Then the voices came again, with Margaret's joining in. Tension crept out under the yellow and white awning on the upstairs terrace.

Jeremy sat coloring a picture in his crayon book. He stopped, to glance at Adam.

"He isn't going to let us see Daddy any more," Jeremy said, "because Daddy didn't send our money."

Adam turned away. Kneeling, he pressed his face to the white railing. By squeezing hard between two of the bars, he could see the tip end of Vicki's car parked in front of the house. His heart began to beat very quickly, the sight giving impetus to his anxiety. He stood up and stared down over the railing. It was too far to jump. There was no place where he could climb down. He walked the length of the railing, studying it.

A car door slammed, closed faultily, and was slammed again. He knew from experience that this would be Vicki's car door, and he waited to hear her footsteps on the stone walk. For a moment there was no sound. He ran back to a corner of the railing and peered between the bars just in time to see the end of the tan convertible disappear.

He shouted. Some nameless word that flung itself through the bars and split the air. It was not a word at all, but a cry, a pained and frustrated cry. Then he turned from the railing and ran past Jeremy's bewildered eyes into his bedroom. He tore at the door handle and started down the stairs, feet flying. Rushing up at him were Margaret and Edmond. His mother's face was white, and Edmond cried: "What is it? What happened?"

He caught at Adam's hurtling body and held it. Adam fought, kicking out at Edmond's stomach, but his foot was caught and held, pinned against the steps. He heard Margaret:

I AM ADAM

"For God's sake, let me past! It might have been Jeremy!" Her skirts slapped by Adam's face, and she called: "Jeremy! Jeremy!"

"It was you!" he heard Edmond say. The yellow-brown eyes were blazing. "It was you, wasn't it?"

Adam allowed his body to go limp. He lay there looking up at Edmond's enraged face, and a weary triumph went through him. They could take a lot of things away from him, but not the power to hurt them back.

That terrible, touch-and-go summer. . . .

Vicki came alone one day. Adam and Jeremy were having lunch with Margaret when Vicki rang the bell. The maid was upstairs. Only a moment before, Adam had heard her plump the bedpillows with the usual resounding smack. Now he went to open the door.

"Hi, sweetie." Vicki bent to kiss his forehead. "Mommy home?"

Adam looked at her with a sudden sense of panic. He didn't know why it should frighten him to see her here, but it did. Vicki watched him for a moment, then touched his head with her gloved hand.

"You just tell her I'm here. It'll be all right. I promise."

Vicki had never broken a promise. Never yet. . . .

"You better come in."

"Thank you, Adam."

"Adam?" It was Margaret, coming from the back of the house, appearing in the hallway. "Oh."

"Hello, Margaret."

"What a surprise." Margaret's voice was flat.

"I'd like to talk to you."

Margaret glanced down at Adam.

"Go in and finish your lunch, darling." She waited until he had turned back toward the kitchen. "Would you care for a drink?" he heard her ask.

In the kitchen, Jeremy looked up questioningly.

"It's Vicki."

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They blinked at each other, as united as two enemies thrown into a conspiracy against a third.

"What does she want?"

Adam shrugged.

"Let's go listen," whispered Jeremy.

But they heard nothing. From behind the closed living-room door came a quiet buzz of voices, and that was all. When the footsteps came at them across the carpet, they barely scampered away from the door in time to avoid being caught. The front door closed and Margaret's heels clattered nervously back into the kitchen. Her face was pale, her mouth drawn into a thin, ugly line. She looked at the twins for a moment, as if she didn't really see them.

"Did Vicki go away?" Jeremy asked.

"Yes." Her expression was that of a person startled back to reality. Her eyes focused on her sons now.

"Go upstairs to the terrace and play."

"You said we were going to the club," Jeremy reminded her, his voice already trembling with tears. "You said we could get a swimming lesson today. You promised."

"Get upstairs before I give you something to cry about."

They backed away from her, wide-eyed. When they were halfway up the stairs they heard her at the telephone. They stopping, leaning over the banister to listen.

"She just left, Ed. Ed, they can't do anything like that, can they? I'll die. It'll be one of those disgusting things all over the front pages. My God, your job—" She paused. "All right, all right. But hurry. I'm a wreck, an absolute wreck."

Adam touched his brother's arm and they ascended the rest of the stairs noiselessly. For the balance of the day they played upstairs, instinctively quiet.

That night, lying in bed, Adam looked out of his window and watched the summer stars, while he listened to his mother's weeping.

"But, Ed, I tell you, she'll do it! Maybe Vince wouldn't, but she—she's deadly! If you were here today, if you'd listened to her—that calm, deadly voice!"

I AM ADAM

"There's no point in your getting hysterical," Edmond said.

"But I'm trying to tell you, we can't do it the way you want to! They've been to a lawyer who told them non-payment has nothing to do with visitation rights. Don't you understand? They say it's the children's right to see the father, more than the father's right to see the children! If we don't give in, they'll take us to court. And I'll be made out a bigamist. You know there are a thousand reasons why a Mexican divorce can be made to seem illegal, if they want to start anything."

"They won't start anything."

"They will! They will! It'll be all over the papers, and they might even start investigating your job—"

"Investigating my job in exactly what way?" Edmond's voice was icy. "I see no call for this kind of implication from you, Margaret. If you have any objections to the way I make my money, you can stop shrieking and say it outright."

"Oh, God. I wasn't making any implications, Edmond, don't do this to me. Don't twist around what I say, the way he did! If you start that too, I—I'll kill myself!"

"I keep my gun in the top drawer of the night table," he said coldly. "Go right ahead. It's loaded."

There was a short, shocked silence. Then Margaret whispered something Adam could not hear.

"That's better, Meg. Now let's talk it over sanely. I'll tell you one thing. I'll take the kids away from him altogether before I give in to this kind of blackmail. I have a lot of friends, Meg, and all in the right places. Now, from the beginning. Calmly, please. Exactly what did she say?"

Adam strained to hear, but Margaret's voice was just a murmur now and he could not make out the words. Once she raised her voice to say bitterly: "When I think that in the beginning I was sorry for him! How I went out of my way to make it easier for him, always dressing the kids just right, making sure they were ready when he came for them!" And then the murmur again, going on and on as the sky darkened and Adam's lids closed.

From that point in early summer until autumn, they never

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knew whether or not they would spend time with Vince unless they actually found themselves sitting in the tan convertible.

"If we make it tough enough, he'll get tired of the whole thing," Edmond said. "Not so tough we have to go to court about it—just enough to keep him hopping. We'll see how he likes it, never knowing from one week to the next whether he'll see the kids or not. It may take time, but believe me, Meg, I know human nature. He'll get tired of the run-around eventually. That's the way we get rid of nuisances in my business. Now don't forget, Meg, when he calls tonight, you tell him he'll have to call back Saturday morning. You aren't sure whether we'll have the kids in town or not."

"I won't forget," Margaret said, her eyes weary.

Once or twice Edmond actually took them away for a weekend. Other times there were events at the club. Jeremy told Vince point-blank that he didn't want to miss the Sunday morning swimming meets, in which his name had been entered. Even Adam waited for Vince's response to this with a certain guilty anxiety. Edmond had promised both of them silver stop-watches if Jeremy should win a cup.

"Well," Vince said, his voice resigned. "Suppose we give up the weekends, just spend Saturday together for the rest of the summer. Is that okay?"

Jeremy nodded happily.

"I got a silver card for last week's meet, Daddy. Maybe I'll get a cup soon." He took his wallet from his pocket and started to remove the card. Adam stood rooted to the spot. He wanted to cry out, no, no! But he stood voiceless.

"See, Daddy?"

Vince took the silver card. His face wore the usual adult look of smiling surprise, even before he glanced at the card. Adam watched as the smile froze.

"What—" Vince broke off. Everything in his face seemed to tighten, almost to grow old. "Jeremy Wenn, is it? How come?"

"Oh, that's just for the club," Jeremy said. He took the card back and fitted it into his wallet. "It's really Jeremy Henlein,

I AM ADAM

but Edmond wanted his family to all have the same name at the club."

"His family?"

Jeremy didn't hear him. He was examining a torn edge of his wallet.

"Gosh, Daddy, this wallet is all ripped. I better get a new one."

"I'll get you one, son." Vince's voice was sick.

Adam wanted to run to his father, to tell him that he would stay with him on Sundays. But he hung back. Something always seemed to hang back inside of him, wanting at the same time to spring forward. He didn't have the proper words for some of these thoughts or perhaps he wasn't sure what the thoughts were. It was like swinging on a giant pendulum, back and forth, back and forth, forever determined to jump off at one side or the other, but never daring.

That night Vicki said suddenly at the dinner table: "Look, kids. I have something to say to you."

Vince's face took on that instant wariness.

"You know," Vicki said, "that your father and I are pretty crazy about you two brats. And the truth is, they're trying to fix things so we can't see you any more. I'm not really worried, because I know you two pretty well. You're Vince's kids and that's that. Even if they took you away for a while, as soon as you were a little older, you'd come scooting back to your father, where you belong. But I'll be darned if we're going to ignore the rest of it, this business of changing your names and generally poisoning your minds—"

"Vicki!"

"Don't stop me, Vince. They're not babies. They're entitled to the truth, at least from us. God knows they won't get it from them. And the truth is that Edmond Wenn has made up his mind to take them away from you, Vince. He isn't the kind to let himself in for diapers and two-o'clock feedings, oh, no, so no babies of his own, thank you. But he'll be glad to claim parenthood of a couple of handsome ready-made sons who are already past the drooling stage. It pleases his ego, no

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doubt, when people admire them." She glanced at Jeremy. "You'll remember what I said, won't you? You'll remember that you are Jeremy Henlein, and your father is Vince Henlein, and he loves you. No matter what happens you'll remember that, won't you?"

"Yes," Jeremy said in an amiable voice. "I will."

Vicki turned to Adam. He tried to pull his gaze away before she could fasten it down, but it was too late. She looked at him, and through him. As always, she knew every thought he was thinking, and he felt himself reddening. For he was thinking that even if everything she had said was true, at least as much as he had understood of it, still he was not making this bargain with Vicki. It was not Vicki's bargain to make.

He drew his gaze away from her at last and looked at Vince. There, in silence, he made a promise stronger than any words.

Then at the end of the summer came Jeremy's final betrayal.

Margaret told them about the new school in a gay, lilting voice, contradicted by the nervous twisting of her wedding ring around and around on her finger.

"There's just one thing," she said.

Echo of Edmond. *Just one thing, I prefer we all use the same name at the club.*

"Just this one thing. We've decided to let you go on using Edmond's name at this new school, since most of the kids will be from the club. It would be awfully embarrassing, wouldn't it, if they found out Edmond wasn't really your father, after all this time? I mean, we want to save you any embarrassment. And it's as if we've started a new life, really, isn't it? I mean, we have a new house and each of you has a new room and all sorts of toys. You're very lucky little boys to have someone like Edmond, who—"

The sweet gay voice went on and on, fingers twisting more and more quickly at her ring. Her hands were very thin. She no longer wore the huge topaz, but even her diamond wedding ring looked too big for her.

"And besides, Wenn is such a lovely name. Really, the name

I AM ADAM

Henlein is a nuisance sometimes. It's always being spelled wrong." Her eyes looked into Adam's and she faltered, then hurried on. "Anyway, I wanted to tell you about the school. It's only a few weeks off, you know. Well? What have you two lucky little ducks got to say about it?"

"Mommy?"

"Yes, Jeremy?"

"Is your name Wenn?"

Margaret nodded.

"That's part of it, darling. I just hate having a different name than my children have. So when we're all named Wenn, I'll be a lot happier."

"I want to have the same name as you have."

"I know you do, darling." Her dark eyes warmed as she gazed at Jeremy. But she still avoided Adam's face, even when she said: "Run along now, both of you."

The summer was nearly—not quite—over.

XIII

EVEN NOW, even so many years later, it was hard to speak of the way in which that summer had ended. He had to force the reluctant memories from his brain, like squeezing toothpaste from a dried-out tube.

"I feel as though my mind has come to a full stop," he said in a dreary voice. He looked down at his clenched fist, then forced the fingers to open and turned his palm upward. He found himself staring at the small triangular scar between his left thumb and forefinger. Like a brand. . . .

"Margaret," he said, and stopped, clenching his fingers convulsively over the scar. But staring down at his closed fist, he knew the scar was still there, unconcealable. It would never go away, any more than the memories would go away. Slowly his fingers opened again. "Margaret said she would kill herself."

"Why?" The probing, disturbing voice. "Why, Adam?"

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He shook his head.

"Come. I feel we are tracking down something very important. Try. Margaret said she would kill herself."

"Yes."

"And did she try?"

He looked at Dr. Kiraly with sober eyes.

"Did she try to kill herself, Adam?"

"No."

"What did happen?"

"I don't know. I—I have a headache. I can't think about anything else. My head hurts very badly."

"Would you like some aspirin?"

"No. I never take pills."

"Is that how Margaret tried to kill herself?"

"Huh?"

"Did she try taking pills?"

He looked at her and started to laugh. It sounded odd in his own ears, like the laughter of someone who has bumped his elbow and is caught between pain and absurdity.

"How did she try to kill herself, Adam?"

He did not answer. Instead, he moved his shoulders in a restless way, as though he wondered why he stayed here, when he wanted to leave. An urgency almost physical was tugging him to his feet. But something held him. He found his eyes searching Dr. Kiraly's face, hunting there for some clue to what she wanted from him.

"Start at the beginning," she said gently.

"We were upstairs, Jeremy and I."

"On the terrace?"

"No." How strange, how unsteady, his voice was! "We were in Jeremy's room when the doorbell rang."

Margaret's thin, clickety heels. Her voice sailing up to them. "I'll get it, Ernestine!" to the oversized maid. It was just before bedtime. They wore white seersucker pajamas, and were having their last few minutes of playtime. They were quarreling—painting in a picture book, and quarreling about who would paint the yellow parts.

"I must do it," said Jeremy, "it's my book."

"You did the blue."

"Blue is ugly."

"No," Adam said, "blue is nice."

"I'll do the yellow."

They heard Margaret running through the house, and the familiar slam of the screen door, leading to the downstairs patio. Margaret cried: "Edmond, Edmond!" in a terrified voice. "Ed!"

Jeremy backed away from the painting table and started toward the stairs.

"No," said Adam. "This way."

That peculiar, unthinking unity sprang alive between them. They moved together toward the terrace. At one side they would be directly over the patio, though the jutting room concealed it.

"Here," Adam said, "over here."

They braced their feet on the bottom of the railing and leaned out over the projecting roof. Below them, they caught the sound of Edmond's chair scraping back, and his startled query.

"They've done it! They've done it!" Margaret cried. "Here! Here, it just came! A man rang the bell and—"

"You fool! Why did you take it?"

"Why did I—"

"Yes! Why did you tell him who you were?"

"But he—he asked for Mrs. Wenn! Naturally, I—"

"Naturally! You held out your hand like a fool and let some half-ass process-server hand you a summons! Naturally!"

"Edmond, listen! Please listen. Don't be angry with me, not now." Her voice started on a low note and rose unsteadily. "They can do terrible things to me in court. I talked to Harry Winters at the club and he said—"

"You talked to a lawyer without telling me?"

"To Harry—Harry Winters! The other afternoon at the club, sitting at the bar. Just a casual conversation! My God, you don't think I went to his office, made a regular appointment or

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anything, to talk to a lawyer without telling you? Listen, Harry said—

"I don't care what Harry said!"

The chair made another sound against the stone terrace.

"What do you mean? Why are you sitting down? You've got to do something, phone someone, phone Harry—"

"Harry Winters doesn't happen to be my attorney. He's a second-rate lawyer who's been playing politics with the Democrats for years and never got anywhere. I don't know why they let him in the club. And I am certainly not pleased to find that my wife has discussed our most personal affairs with him."

"Call Matt Geraldson, then—he drew up my original separation agreement! I don't care who, Ed, but do something!"

"I'll talk to the Commissioner about it tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, Ed? For God's sake, can't you call him now? You don't understand. They might even try to—to take the kids away from me!"

"Nonsense."

"They might! They might, Ed!" Her voice grew shrill with panic now. "You don't understand. How do I know what Vince has on me?"

"What kind of hysterical imbecility is that? What could he possibly have on you?"

There was a drawn-out moment of silence, sharper than words.

Then: "You've got to understand this, Ed." Her voice trembled. "I haven't done anything wrong, I wouldn't, not to you. You know I wouldn't. We just went out for a drink the other afternoon, and God knows who saw us. God knows if they had somebody watching me—"

"Who went out for a drink?" Edmond asked slowly.

"I did. With Harry. Just for a drink, Ed. But now that I think of it, I remember there was someone sitting at the next table who might have been following us. I don't know, I tell you I just don't know!"

There was another silence, longer this time.

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"You filthy bitch," Edmond said quietly.

"No! No, Ed. Listen to me, will you? I swear there was nothing to it—one drink! One drink! What could be more innocent than one single drink? Ed, don't look at me that way. You know how I feel about you, you know how it is with us! I wouldn't do that to you! I swear, I swear! May I drop dead on this spot, dead on this spot tonight, do you hear? Look at me—can't you see it? Can't you see I wouldn't do anything like that? Ed! Ed!" she screamed. "Answer me, tell me you believe me! I'll kill myself, Ed, I'll kill myself!"

"I told you before," he said in a deadly voice, "where my gun is."

"I'll kill myself! I'll shoot myself! I will! I will!" There was the opening snap of the screen door. "I'll—kill—myself!" Now she was fighting, struggling, breathing hoarsely like a trapped animal. "Let go of me. Let—go of me!"

"You fool!"

There was a quick, startling sound, a chair overturning. Instinctively, on the balcony, Jeremy jumped behind the railing. He crouched there, watching Adam with eyes full of terror.

"Will she do it? Will she be dead, Adam?"

Adam jerked his body upright.

"Where are you going?" Jeremy cried.

"We'll take the gun away."

"We can't. We can't touch it." The tears came.

"If you cry, I'll kick your face. Hurry up!"

He knew that Jeremy was on his feet, running behind him through the bedroom and into the hall. Into the big front room with the satin bedspread, and the crystal frame with their pictures in it, standing on the dresser. The room was very quiet, shutting the blazing conflict outside. It was so quiet that they jerked to a stop in the doorway.

"We better take it," Jeremy said now. "But how will we open the drawer?" His voice shook. "They locked it."

Adam walked across the rug to the night table. He reached in under the base of the china figurine lamp and drew out a little brass key. He inserted it in the drawer of the night table,

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opened it, and stared down at the gun. It was faintly blue in the shadowed light, with a gleam of pink in the steel. He lifted it from the drawer and nearly dropped it. It was heavier than he had thought. He pushed the drawer shut and started out of the room, clutching the gun tightly.

"Where will we put it?" Jeremy was breathless, blocking the doorway. "We'll have to hide it, won't we?"

"Yes. I'll do it. Get out of my way."

"Give it to me. I have a good place to hide it, Adam."

"Where?"

"In—in my bed. Under my pillow!" He stammered with excitement and fear.

"No. It will go under *my* pillow!" Adam pushed past him into the hallway.

"I said it first!"

"I don't care. I got it."

"It's not fair! It's not fair! I'll tell!" He ran to the top of the stairs. "Mommy! Mommy, Mommy!"

"Shut up! Shut up or I'll kill you!"

"Mommy!"

Adam leaped at his brother. They rolled over the carpet, toward the door to Jeremy's room, then rolled back again, fighting bitterly. The gun lay squeezed between them. It jutted into Adam's side, and he gasped.

"Give me—that!" gritted Jeremy.

"No! Don't—you—touch it!"

He felt one knee jerk downward suddenly. It had gone over the edge of the top step. He pressed Jeremy to the wall with his shoulder in one final burst of effort, grasping the gun in both his hands. In the corner of his mind he realized he was in danger of toppling down the steps and knew he must fight harder to keep his balance. He mustn't fall, he mustn't.

Jeremy jerked suddenly forward, and Adam felt his brother's hand on the handle of the gun, his fingers digging for control of it. "Now I have it!" he heard Jeremy cry. "Now I have it!"

"No you haven't!"

He felt the gun encircled by both Jeremy's hand and his

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own and he fought for a better grip. He had it, he almost had it!

"Give it to me!" he cried, and made a great wrench backward, away from Jeremy.

Something roared in his ears.

He knelt there, stunned, while Jeremy's voice screamed in the silence, screamed again, and stopped. He looked down at his hands, where the gun had been. He held nothing. Nothing but blood. Blood all over his fingers, the sight of it putting into swift motion the process of pain. The pain shot up his arm, twisted in his stomach, looped inside of him.

The wall in front of him moved queerly, seeming to circle before his eyes. Jeremy lay and stared up at him. Adam turned his head. At the bottom of the stairs stood his mother and Edmond, like a pair of black-and-white figures in a newspaper picture, caught in some strange, dramatic pose. They stood motionless, or it seemed so to Adam. He looked at his mother and shook his head a little at her. No words could describe the kaleidoscope of emotions whirling through him, racking him with pain and fear.

"Jeremy shot me," he said, and felt something making his lids flutter. He closed his eyes tightly, and pitched forward toward Margaret's strange face, tumbling over and over down the carpeted steps into blackness.

He could see a row of tiny lights, moving in a majestic spiral, toward him and away, toward him and away. Objectively he stood off and admired the sight, and then the lights moved in on him all at once and gripped him at the back of his neck, turning into cold, bright fingers of steel. They bent him forward, while he fought.

"Just lean forward, Adam." Dr. Kiraly's voice. "You'll be quite all right in a minute."

Recognizing her voice, he sank in a tremulous slump, his head dangling weakly between his knees. On the back of his neck her fingers still rested, cool and strong.

"Better?"

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He nodded, still bending over.

"You can sit up now, I think."

He did not want to sit up. He wanted to sink lower and lower, out of sight completely. He wanted to close his eyes and sleep, not to think. Like a drugged man, he pulled himself up. She was behind her desk again, watching him.

"I—what happened?"

"It was a pretty tough thing to tell me about. You had a dizzy feeling for a minute." She looked down at her desk briefly, then back at Adam. "I'd like to ask you some questions."

He shook his head. "I can't. I—I can't talk any more today."

"It's important."

"Why?" he said wearily. "Why is it important right now? Why can't it wait until tomorrow?"

"This is Friday. We won't be here tomorrow. And I don't think we ought to let it go until Monday."

"What do you want?" His voice was dull.

"I want to know what happened afterward."

"Afterward?"

"Afterward."

"You mean—" He broke off, wetting his lips. He would have gone on if only to finish this hour and escape. But working against him was a desperate sense of lassitude. It was like a thick mud wall that had risen between him and his thoughts.

"They—there was an ambulance." Had there been? He remembered it hazily. Someone bending over him, all around him a row of white faces. Had it really happened? Yes, there had been a tourniquet on his arm, his left arm, fearfully tight. He had wanted to look at his hand, at the place where the blood had spurted, between the thumb and index finger. Someone had bent closer, a stranger, who said: "*No, no, no, no, no . . . !*"

"There were a lot of people." His tongue thickened in his mouth. "I remember there were strange people."

"Where was Margaret?"

"She—I heard her crying. I couldn't see her."

"And Edmond?"

He shook his head.

"Try to remember."

"I can't," he said, his voice tight.

"Try. Where was Edmond?"

"I tell you, I can't remember."

"Did they put you into the ambulance?"

"No. Yes."

"Did they?"

"Yes."

"Who was with you?"

His hands clenched and opened, clenched again. He shook his head.

"Was Margaret with you?"

Something started to tremble inside of him. Something odd, but familiar. Once he had watched in a science class while a wet, wobbly butterfly had broken forth from a quivering cocoon. He felt as though that were happening inside of him now. The cocoon inside of him quivered, ready to burst.

"Was Margaret with you?"

"No." His hands gripped the sides of his chair, and he listened to the thing inside of him, the bursting, alive thing.

"You were alone?"

"Yes."

"Edmond was nowhere in sight?"

"No."

"But Margaret was crying."

"I told you. Yes."

The trembling inside him quickened in readiness.

"And—where was Jeremy?"

It burst. It burst and pitched him to his feet. He heard himself speak, in a flat voice.

"I'm sorry. I must go now."

He walked in a level line across her office, though he felt that his legs were staggering.

"Wait a minute!" her voice commanded.

"No!"

He opened the door.

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"Adam!"

He was in a hallway, a strange hallway, and the thing that had burst inside of him was not a butterfly, but a hot rushing stream that poured through him, while he staggered to a second door and pulled it open. A wild, racked sound came from his throat. Laughter! He stood laughing at the top of a stairway, then lurched, down, down, down, rocketing from banister to wall and back again, laughing all the while, screaming, sobbing with laughter. A stranger possessed his body, yet he himself was the stranger! A lost friend who had returned. He and the stranger went stumbling down the endless steps, filling the hallway with their bitter laughter.

He was in the street now, an unknown street that gleamed with sunshine. He stopped suddenly, drew in a hoarse breath and waited, while the echo of the past few minutes dinned in his head. He did not understand the din. With a perplexed look, he walked down the street. Automatically he stopped for a traffic light on the corner. When it turned green, he crossed. The street was lined with stores. A fish store, a bar, a small tailor shop. Another bar. He ambled across the pavement and mounted a black tile step. The barroom was walled in dark wood, as cool as the tile. Two or three men at the bar eyed him carelessly as he slid onto a stool.

The bartender stood in an open doorway that led to a back room. He was talking to someone, and with his forefinger motioned to Adam to wait. Adam shrugged. He looked at the bottles lined up against the wall. Above them was a mirror. He looked into the glass and his lips slowly parted. Something warm seemed to trickle through his limbs and spread up to his stomach. Of course. He had known in his heart all along. He had known.

"Jeremy," he said softly.

"What's that, son?" The bartender was back, his voice crisp. "Beer?"

"Two beers," Adam said. The miracle sounded in his voice, filled his whole body.

"Two?"

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"One for my brother."

"Huh? Oh, sure—whatever you say, son."

Adam sipped at his beer, watching as Jeremy came toward him from the other side of the mirror, and climbed onto a stool. They looked steadily at each other, united even now, after the fearful thing that had happened. Even the last, most frightening of quarrels was forgotten, and they were at peace again.

"I knew all the time," Adam said dreamily. "I knew it was just something I imagined. I'm not a murderer."

"Of course not."

"Drink your beer," Adam said. "Drink up."

Jeremy shook his head.

"I never liked beer. You drink it."

"Thank you," Adam smiled. He lifted the second glass. "Thank you, and may we always be together this way, Jeremy." He drank Jeremy's beer.

XIV

LATER THAT afternoon, they moved from the bar to a small table, one of several along the opposite wall. They sat deep in conversation. Adam did not miss the curious glances coming from other patrons, but he was not in the least intimidated by them. Everyone had always stared and made a great fuss over them because they looked so uncannily alike.

"Of course, I knew the bad penny would turn up again sooner or later," Adam said, and laughed. But his expression changed quickly as he leaned across the table. "I don't mean that the way it sounds. Please don't think—"

"I'm not offended," Jeremy said, smiling.

"I hope not. I'd hate to have you go off in a huff. Incidentally, how on earth did you know where I'd be today?"

Jeremy took a moment to consider this.

"I've been following you for weeks," he said finally.

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"Oh—then it was you!"

"What do you mean?"

Adam shook his head, glanced about, and said in a low voice: "I knew someone was following me. I couldn't imagine why. It isn't as though I did anything wrong." He looked down, frowning, at his glass. "I'm sure I haven't done anything wrong."

"Forget it," Jeremy said. "I told you a long time ago not to take everything so seriously."

"Was that you?" Adam was puzzled now. "I thought it was Buff who said that. Funny, how I keep mixing things up that you and Buff said to me. And you aren't even alike. Except for those tassels on your shoes. Buff wore tassels, too. But he has the brightest red hair, and green eyes. He looks like a leprechaun."

"And what do I look like?"

"You look like me. What was it Vicki said? Like Italian aristocracy? That's a long way from a leprechaun."

He laughed so merrily that a newcomer on his way to the bar craned his neck and bumped into a stool. Adam smothered a burst of amusement. Oh, he was always so alive when Jeremy came!

"Have you heard from Allegra?"

The question came suddenly, shattering his thoughts.

"Jeremy! How can you ask me that now?"

"I only asked if—"

"I know. I know, but I don't want to talk about her. Not to you, anyway." His brother shrugged, but Adam's face remained dark. Mentioning Allegra after all that had happened was like picking at bricks in a dike, daring the ocean. He wanted to get the taste of the whole thing out of his mouth, to change the subject. Jeremy changed it for him.

"Where do we sleep tonight, Adam?"

Adam's anger slipped away.

"I thought I might take you back to my room," he said. Now he sat rapidly calculating. "But I can't do that. Believe me, you aren't the only one following me. There's someone on

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the second floor who watches me through a crack in the door. We'll have to think of somewhere else to sleep."

"How about Central Park? Lucky for us it's good weather."

Adam glanced at his brother uncertainly.

"Do you think that would be—" He broke off, then said: "I can't believe it. When we were kids I always felt so much older than you, and now you're the wiser one. I don't mind it. Only I wish you hadn't—done that other thing. You know."

"Yes. But that can't be changed now, can it? Look, why don't you have some more beer? Then we'll walk over to the park and look around."

The bar was more crowded now, all the stools filled. Adam stood with several other men waiting to order his beer. He turned to ask if Jeremy was sure he did not care for any. But Jeremy had left the little table. After a moment Adam spotted him, standing quite close. No, Jeremy wanted no beer.

"Something else, then?"

"I don't drink at all."

Adam frowned.

"Funny, I thought it was Buff who didn't—" But of course Buff drank, didn't he? Those gin things. "You don't mind if I switch to another drink, do you? Instead of beer?"

Jeremy shook his head.

The baldheaded bartender came over for Adam's order.

"One gin and Schweppes."

The man looked at him in a joking way.

"What happened to your brother?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"You sure got a straight face for that kind of stuff."

Adam looked at him coldly.

"May I have my gin and Schweppes, please?"

He turned furtively to Jeremy.

"Did you hear that? Trying to get information! Look, after my drink we'll leave. Just walk out as though nothing were wrong." He dropped a dollar bill on the bar. A man at his elbow glanced at him, and Adam said: "I'm sorry."

"What for?"

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"Didn't I bump you?"

"No."

"Oh. The way you looked at me, I thought I must have bumped you."

"What do you mean, the way I looked at you?" The man had a big square unshaven face and a fedora on the back of his head. He turned his sullen face away. "Just keep out of my way."

Adam picked up his drink, turning his back, but unable to meet Jeremy's eyes. He was ashamed because the man had made him look foolish and weak. He said to Jeremy in a low rush: "I didn't want any trouble. If I were here alone—" He broke off and drank in dogged silence. Jeremy did not believe him. He didn't care. He knew he was brave. Brave and bold, brave and strong. How did it go?

He had two more drinks, feeling the warmth and a slight dizziness. Finally he could bear the waiting no longer. He reached out to touch Jeremy.

"Come on. Let's go."

His hand touched someone else, the man with the dark unshaven face and the tilted fedora.

"You talking to me?"

"I'm talking to my brother."

"What brother?"

"My brother Jeremy." He meant to keep his voice level, but it came out like a sneer. He saw the man getting off his stool, heard the bartender say through a screen of smoke: "Wait. Leave the kid alone. He's got this business about a brother."

But the man came at him.

"Looking for trouble, hey, boy?"

"Yes," Adam said, his tongue furry. "You got some?"

He felt himself being rushed along through a tunnel of voices and shoulders. The summer air hit him like a blast. He made a gurgling sound in his throat, almost a laugh. It had grown dark, and the street was a row of dim doorways, and neons softened by the weather. A hand held him at the collar and jerked him into one of the doorways. He smelled whisky

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close to his face, a different smell from that of the gin. The gin had been pleasant, lulling him back to a time and a memory sweet and indistinct. Margaret? Margaret and someone else. The woman who came to breakfast in her bathing suit. Cheryl. . . .

The whisky smell brought him back sharply and sickened him.

"I have to get to my brother," he said in a thick voice. "You better let me go. My brother'll kill you. My brother is—"

"Yeah?"

"My brother is a criminal," he said. Then for an instant his mind seemed to clear, and he recognized the precarious reality of his situation. He cried out. Something struck at him, hard, an open hand across his face, coming back before he could suck in his breath and striking him again. Again and again, while fingers dug at the back of his collar and choked him. The lucid moment twisted out into a streamer of colored ribbon, snapping wildly in the wind. He felt himself sinking down, inch by inch, into a corner of darkness.

"And one for your brother, the criminal!"

There was a grunt, a laugh, and a final blow. Then a release so sudden that Adam collapsed like a marionette without strings.

He lay there, darkness surrounding him, darkness crawling into his body.

XV

HE FELT himself awakening and tried to twist back into sleep. Then suddenly his eyes were opened, staring into pitch-darkness. While his heart began to pound in quick terror, beneath his shoulder he became aware of the familiar series of lumps and his foot touched the wall where it was paneled at the foot of his own bed, in his own room. With his toes he checked the wall. He lay motionless, while bewildered thoughts crowded in and tumbled over one another in his head.

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Something had happened to him, something terrible. Terribly violent. . . .

In that instant he became aware that he was not alone in his room. Was someone breathing steadily, close to him, or was it just the same old dread voice of fear that came in the dark? His hand froze on the counterpane, then moved out stiffly and felt the surface of the bed. No one lay beside him, but the breathing continued. It was stealthy, he sensed it.

Fright hollowed his chest, but danger was more endurable than the darkness. Quickly! His hand shot to the light over his bed. He jerked it on and leaped to a sitting position.

There was a swift scramble, the sound of a chair clattering over, a stifled exclamation.

"Holy Christmas!"

He couldn't see. The light blinded him. Pain shot through his head and snaked down his jaw. He moaned and covered his eyes with his arm.

"Serves you right, jumping up like that!"

From beneath his arm, Adam stared out, and slowly the arm lowered.

"It's—it's you!" he stammered.

She jammed her hands angrily into the pockets of her jeans.

"Who were you expecting, your fairy godmother?"

He stared at her and it was like looking at someone through a curtain of gauze. Even when he blinked, the fabric of unreality hung there between them. It wasn't that he didn't recognize her, the square little freckled face, the clipped hair. But why was she there? He frowned in an effort to remember.

"You were lying on the steps down in front of the house." She pulled a cigarette from her shirt pocket and lit it, shaking out the match and flipping it toward the open window. "I was always a sucker for stray cats."

She made no sense. He was sure he barely knew her, had had nothing to do with her—had not even seen her since that first abortive evening. He didn't even remember her name. No, wait. Pat. That was it. Pat. He had quarreled with her. He remembered that part of it. Had it been tonight? No, not to-

night. That other night. Then what was it that had happened tonight? It hung on the rim of his consciousness, tantalizing him but refusing to show its face. Yet somehow he knew that she had not been part of it, not tonight.

He wet his lips.

"You mean I was just—just lying there?"

"Yep."

"On the steps? Just lying on the steps?"

"Well, you weren't doing any foxtrot, kid. You were out colder than ice." She drew on her cigarette and looked at him through narrowed eyes. "I suppose I shouldn't have butted in, but like Nick says, I'm just a little mother at heart. I'm a soft touch for characters like you. Maybe because he was like that once himself."

"He?"

"Nick. My brother. He was a lush once, too."

"A—a lush?" He gave a quick, strangled laugh. "You mean you think I'm a—an alcoholic?"

"You trying to tell me you aren't?"

He could only stare at her, speechless.

"It's okay," she said. "Now I understand about last time. You were trying to get on the wagon, right? I remember how it used to get Nick, all nervous, mean as hell. Not that he ever stuck. It took a year in the clink to straighten him out. Go figure." She gave a brief laugh. "It was your face that got me, downstairs. I started to walk past you and then I saw your face. Like Nick's face used to look when he came home sometimes, all beat up."

Wonderingly, he put a hand up to touch his face and winced. The skin was raw. Now he became aware of soreness all over his body. Even the inside of his mouth hurt.

"God. I feel as if somebody socked me."

"Somebody did. Wait till you look in the mirror."

He bent his head over his knees and closed his eyes. His head throbbed. Drunk. Drunk for the first time in his life. Mixed with the nausea was a queer sense of elation. At school they had often talked about drinking, getting a load on. It

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had been considered intensely sophisticated. He had never been in on it until now. Now he could tell them. . . .

"Come on. Get up and take a shower. I'll fix you a bromo."

"I don't think I can stand up."

"You can if you try."

"Please." He groaned and stayed where he was, with his head bent over his knees. He remembered the last time he had been with her, the deadly cheerfulness of her silly little philosophical bits. Not now, he thought. Please, not tonight.

"Come on, sonny."

He felt her hand on his wrist. He turned and sat dazed on the edge of his bed. Glancing downward he saw that he wore only his shorts and he remembered the awful moment when Dr. Kiraly had seen him with his pajama bottoms opened. Something dived in the pit of his stomach and all else was jerked out of his mind. He was going to be sick.

He staggered across the room and hung over the sink, retching. He turned the water on in a belated attempt to hide the shameful sound.

"That's the boy. Here. Here's a towel."

He wet the end of it and touched it to his face and let out a yelp. In the mirror he caught sight of himself and stood with the towel hanging in mid-air. It couldn't really be his face. It was a strange, swollen face with mumps or monster hives. In the back of his mind something began to tick, then to beat, rhythmically, back and forth, pounding, smacking. Something about tonight. Tonight. He tried frantically to grasp at it but it was gone.

"Go on and take a shower," Pat's voice cut in. "Better not lock the bathroom door. If you're not out in ten minutes I'll check on you, so leave your shorts on." He felt the blood rushing to his face and heard her laugh. "My. Such a modest dipso."

"I hate disillusioning you." His voice was stiff. "But I don't happen to be a dipso. I never got drunk before in my life."

After a minute she said: "On the level?"

"That's right."

"You mean I could be that wrong?"

"You could."

"Then what made you act like such a skunk? Last time?"

"I happen to have a rotten disposition."

"I don't get it."

"Hang around. You'll find out."

There was a little pause.

"Well," she said, "let's not figure it out tonight. Okay? Tomorrow is another day."

"Thanks for the corny reminder."

"Corny things get that way by being true."

"Jesus Christ," he said. He grabbed his bathrobe and stumbled out of the room. In the bathroom he wrenched the shower faucet so hard that a spray of ice water sent him leaping back from the side of the tub. At the move his head began to pound, and it took a full minute before the throbbing subsided. He stood subdued, his fingers pressing against his temples.

As he showered, he watched the grime running along the bottom of the tub in a narrow stream. He turned his face up to the water and felt each drop stabbing him. The pain increased, but he found a peculiar satisfaction in bearing it, feeling it grow less and less until it was a single covering of numbness. He turned off the water, dried himself, and got into his robe.

Only as he tied his belt did he realize that a strange girl was alone in his room, free to go through his belongings, free to search for some small fatal clue to his identity.

He didn't remember crossing the hall or opening the door of his room. He was aware, with indrawn breath, that she was standing in front of his dresser, touching something he could not see, something hidden by her shoulder and upraised arm. He felt his lips draw back, taut, across his gums. On bare feet he crossed the room and twisted her around by the shoulders.

"What are you looking for?" It was a harsh threat.

"Let go of me!"

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"What are you looking for?"

Anger slid across her face, then swiftly vanished. A sly, barely visible smile appeared behind her eyes.

"Why don't you look and see? You'll find an envelope, one of those soap-ad things they put under the door this morning. I was using it for an ashtray. Go ahead. Look at it. You'll find a bunch of ashes." The smile deepened into a taunt. "On the lam, aren't you, kid? I knew it. I watched you a couple of times. Oh, I know all the signs, from Nick. Looking around corners, stopping on the steps to listen. Next to him you're a punk amateur."

He felt his fingers tighten on her shoulders and saw triumph on her face at this obvious reaction to the theory. He wanted to slap her, slap the stupid complacent knowledge out of her. Yet something told him to halt, to examine. For he was closer to danger at this moment than he had ever been.

"You can trust me," he heard her say. "Sometimes you can get the load off your shoulders if you just tell it to somebody. And honestly, I'd never tell."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"If you think I'm the kind who'd go to the cops—"

"I just told you. I don't know what you're talking about."

She jerked out from under his hands.

"Keep it to yourself, then. What do I care?" She fumbled in her pocket for another cigarette. While she lighted it she talked through tightened lips. "Maybe it's better that way. Nick once said if I didn't know anything, it couldn't hurt me. That doesn't mean I don't have my own ideas about you."

"Such as?"

"Maybe you lied to me before. That could be it. Maybe you're hiding from the boys in the white jackets. A sanitarium. For drunks."

"I told you a few minutes ago—"

"I know, I know." She sat down on the edge of his bed and looked at him thoughtfully. "Or you could be a kid from a small town that got a girl in trouble. I understand in little towns things like that can be pretty tough."

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"You think I'd leave a girl if I got her in trouble?" he asked angrily.

"How do I know?"

"Well, I wouldn't."

She laughed. "There isn't a guy in the world that wouldn't. I know. I just happen to have a couple of girl friends who found out the hard way."

"The voice of experience."

"Why get sarcastic? Did I hit too close to home?" She smoked in silence for a moment, while Adam stood tensely waiting, watching her. "You know," she said, "nobody really gets away with anything."

"No?"

"Uh-huh."

"What are you telling me that for?"

She waved her cigarette vaguely.

"I don't know. It just struck me, that's all. Whatever you're running away from, here you are paying for it already. Maybe nobody else has caught you, but you've caught yourself. See? That's what I mean."

"What makes you think I'm paying for anything?"

"I'm not blind. In fact I'm starting to figure out why you're scared to be nice to anybody. You're afraid to have a friend. Am I right or wrong?" When he made no reply, she said: "That's no way to live. Say, did you ever hear of a man named Ruskin? John Ruskin?"

"You mean the writer?"

She flushed at the note of disbelief in his voice and nodded. Almost defiantly, she said: "I found one of his books in my room when I moved in, and I read it. There was something he said." She stopped, not looking at him. "Oh, what's the difference? Maybe it hasn't got anything to do with all this, anyway."

"No. Tell me. What did he say?"

"Oh, something about learning not only the labors of the earth, but the loveliness." She stared at the floor now, as though she did not dare to meet his eyes. "What I mean is, you're

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spending all your time on the bad part, and none on the good part. Of course that's putting it in my own language."

He felt his hands roll into fists and pressed them behind his back where she wouldn't see them. The conversation had taken a surprising turn, but he wasn't sure it had thrown her far enough off the more dangerous track. He had to do that, then get rid of her.

He made a careful effort to control his voice.

"You know, this is a very interesting theoretical conversation." He halted, wondering if she would know what "theoretical" meant. How else could he put it? "What I mean is—"

"I understand what you said." There was a twisted smile on her mouth. "That's not the only book I ever read. I read a lot of books, see? I don't use certain words because I'm not sure how you say them. But I look them up. I have a dictionary this big. No kidding, you ought to see it. I told Nick I wanted it for Christmas." She gave a little snort. "He thought I was nuts. Who knows? Maybe I am."

Adam stood baffled. Mixed feelings flooded him. Pity. A kind of reluctant admiration. And a lingering coldness that was his own fear of her. Who was she? What kind of a girl was she? He had never known anyone like her. She was part one girl, part another, and the mixture left him filled with confusion. Suddenly he saw in her the peculiar quality of defenselessness that he had always associated with Margaret. With it, he realized, was Vicki's candor—and the hard little outer surface so carefully controlled, so characteristic of another girl. Allegra.

He put his clenched fist up to his mouth and bit hard on his knuckles, staring at her. This was the answer to the query that had haunted him last time he had been with her. He had sought the things in her that he disliked in the others, that he despised, only to discover in this bewildering moment that he had looked in the wrong direction. For the things that were there for him to find were the single facets of each of the three women in his life that had held the most binding appeal of all.

No, he thought, it was not possible. Not this crazy-haired

little imp in blue jeans. The very turn of the words he instinctively used to describe her held a sudden dearness that left him stunned.

"Listen," he heard her say, "you look awful. Maybe you better lie down, huh? Come on. Crawl in and I'll make like Mamma and pat your back till you doze off. Okay?"

He pressed his fist more tightly against his teeth.

"Come on." She got up and stubbed her cigarette out on the stone window ledge and let it fall into the darkness. "Crawl in."

He turned suddenly to the sink and ran the water. Just to do something, to turn away from her. He reached for his toothbrush and poked it into his mouth.

"Hey, you forgot the toothpaste."

He reached for it blindly.

When finally he turned back, she was pulling the counterpane from his bed. It was a wrinkled heap, but she folded it conscientiously and laid it across the green chair. Then she went back to smooth the sheets and turn them down.

"Get in."

He stood looking at her.

"What's the matter now? Oh, for Pete's sake, don't tell me you're still wearing your wet underwear?" He shook his head, and she laughed. "Nothing, then? Okay, get in in the raw. I won't look."

He crossed the room dumbly and took his robe off while she stared out the window. He got into bed on his stomach and lay with his cheek against the pillow, still watching her, wordless.

She came and sat down on the edge of the bed, touching the small of his back through the sheet.

"Just relax. I used to do this for Nick. It always put him to sleep. I guess I talk about Nick a lot, but good or bad, he's all I have. All I care about, anyway."

"Is he still in—"

"The clink? No. He's out of jail now."

"What was he in for?"

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"He's the best lock-picker in New York. Oh, I don't mean it that way, as if I'm proud of it. But, like Nick says, if you're going to be something, be the best there is. I guess you think it's pretty awful having a burglar for a brother. Maybe you'll get sore, but you still make me think of him."

"Thanks."

"You're nothing like him, but there's something I can't quite figure. Tell me honestly, do you drink a lot?"

He shook his head.

"Okay, I'll stop asking you questions. Maybe you're right not to tell me anything."

He felt a prick of guardedness. Just words? To soften him for the final, clever blow? Why believe her? No matter how she struck him, she was one of the outsiders, and they were all against him now. All of them. Except Dr. Kiraly, and there were times when he knew that his safety with her lay only in the fact of her limitless curiosity, that to her he was a bug under a glass, to be examined under a scientifically ground lens.

A strange, discontented hunger pressed into his chest. He moved his head so that he could see Pat sitting on the edge of the bed stroking his back. He felt the expression changing on his face, but there was no way to control it, for it was a grief so real, so bewildering, that a part of him stood off with silent eyes and regarded it almost as a parody.

She saw his face and leaned forward, a blurred figure. Her hand came up to touch his cheek.

"What's the matter? You hurt all over?"

The awkward tenderness in her voice gave a final turn to the emotions in him.

"All over."

The words came roughly, barely audible, for he wanted more than he had ever wanted anything in the world to give in to her touch, to close his eyes and let her fingers comfort him. And still he did not dare, did not dare. He lay desperately still, fighting the longing.

"You're even scared of me," she said wonderingly. "Aren't you?"

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Again he closed his eyes, while her palm moved lightly across his bruised cheek.

"I wouldn't do anything to hurt you," she said. "Don't you know that? I knew it when I was dragging you up the stairs before. You looked like such a beat-up little kid. Do you think I'd do anything to get you in any deeper?"

"Why?" His voice was muffled against the pillow. "Why wouldn't you?"

"I don't know. I guess sometimes you just look at somebody and—" She shook her head. "Even if you didn't care much about them before, it happens all of a sudden, in a second, and there you are. On their side, all the way. Crazy, isn't it?"

Adam lay still for one more rigid moment. Then he turned beneath the sheet so that he lay looking up at her.

"Do you believe in anything?" she asked.

Oddly enough, he knew what she meant.

"I'm not sure. Do you?"

"If you mean God, I'm not sure either." She hesitated. "I read about reincarnation. I believe in that a little. Oh, I don't mean maybe in our next life you'll be a daisy and I'll be an anteater. But I believe in everybody being sort of—linked up. I mean, I'm doing certain things a certain way because maybe four hundred years ago, my great-great-great-grandmother heard a singer go by under her window. And maybe she got soft-hearted when she heard the music, so she was nice to my great-great-grandmother. And then my great-great-grandmother thought of it later on, and she was nice to my great-grandmother. And so on. You see? That links me up with a street-singer from four hundred years ago. Who knows? Maybe some day I'll be nice or mean to somebody, and it will hit somebody in their family in the twenty-fifth century. Get it?"

She was utterly serious. He wanted suddenly, urgently, to laugh. But she would not understand. She would think he was laughing at her. And he wouldn't be.

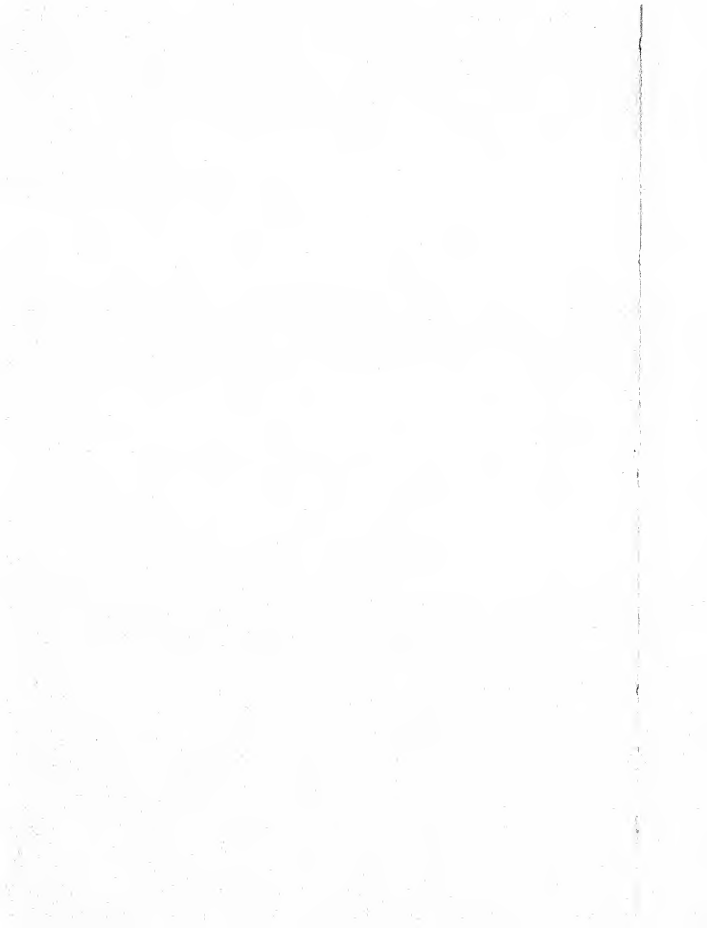
One hand went up to shade his eyes, and as they met hers, he saw the softness in them, the softness she had learned to conceal so well when the world demanded concealment. Her

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willingness to unveil them now, for him, was like an irrevocable proof of what he sought. He reached up and touched the tangle of her hair, closed his fingers convulsively in it, held her that way.

"Never mind," she said. The phrase had no meaning, yet it sounded right to him. Now she whispered it a little fiercely. "Just never mind, see? I've got a feeling it's time for your luck to change. It's that reincarnation again. You get a chance at it every time a new season comes along. Spring is over now and summer is coming in. I always told Nick it was a good time to start over again, when the seasons changed. You sort of get a new start, free. But you have to believe it. You do, don't you? You do believe it."

"I believe it," Adam said, and closed his eyes tightly.



Part Two

SUMMER INTO AUTUMN

XVI

ON THE morning of his twelfth birthday, Adam Wenn lay in his bed in the dormitory at Radbury Hall and watched the rain streak down the windows. The Voice Inside was very strong. It told him this was a terrible morning, but it did not tell him why.

Exams? Fear jumped inside of him, then subsided. The summer was here again, and end-of-term exams were over, weren't they? And somehow he had successfully completed the fifth form.

What was it, then?

The Voice Inside began to chant.

I am Adam Wenn.

My mother is Margaret.

My father is Vince.

My mother is married to Edmond.

My father is married to Vicki.

There was a small, questioning pause. Adam looked at the rain, thought about the rain as hard as he could. Rain streaking down the window, two dots of water joining in a V. V for Vickie, Vince. The Voice Inside gave a sly laugh. Adam knew the Voice was part of him, like a festering limb. Sometimes he

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still fought it, but not often now, only when the senseless fear gripped him so hard it threatened to split his mind in two. Other times, like now, when the fear was still an uneasy thing floating on the surface of his mind, he rode with it, caught between repulsion and curiosity.

He lay very still. Surely there was nothing in the immediate future about which to speculate. In the four years since he had left California, the pattern of his life had been so exact, it left no room for random possibilities. He would spend the last few days of June with his grandparents in Boston, some twenty miles away. After that, two months of summer camp. Radbury in the fall, an upper junior now.

You see? There was nothing to be afraid of. He recalled that he had been afraid, too, of not passing his exams, yet he had passed them with very high marks. This had happened frequently. He knew, of course, why this was so. Someone helped him. Someone. . . .

His bed was the last in a row of twelve beds in the fifth-form dormitory. Next to him Peter Telby stirred. Quick now. What was it? Before Peter got up. Peter might know, and that would be bad. What was it? Sunday morning? Chapel? The deep tolling bells that grayed the light and made the walls tremble? No, this was only Thursday.

And then it burst through to him. It was June 21, the first day of summer.

It was his birthday.

He was twelve.

A chill went through him.

"Gee whizz." From the next bed, like a shock of cold water, came Peter Telby's voice as he sat up and eyed the dismal window. "Rain again."

Adam forced his eyes in Peter's direction. Somehow his thoughts continued to function despite the terror. On the surface he clung to thoughts of Peter, of the rain, of the fact that he was glad when it rained. Life quieted, people withdrew, there was less probing, less pushing, no rush of boys tumbling down the stairs that led to the track and the ball field. No ball

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to catch and no fear of not catching it. Though he always did catch it.

His birthday.

"Rain, rain, rain!" cried Peter.

For three years they had slept next to each other in the last two beds in their dorm, and had sat together at the table. Everything in Radbury Hall was strictly alphabetical, and Telby and Wenn seemed destined never to part. On this basis a mild tolerance had grown between them, though Adam did not presume to think of Peter as his friend. He knew he was no competition for Billy Saltenstone, who slept on the other side of Peter. Billy had a big face full of freckles and he shared Peter's enthusiasm for water tackle, and general pommeling.

"You getting up?" Peter demanded.

"I don't know."

"Huh?"

Adam was silent. He knew Peter was watching him, but that was nothing unusual. They all watched him, even the instructors. Sometimes two or three of them stood whispering about him in one of the corridor corners, cutting off their talk sharply as he approached. At first it had troubled, even angered him. But now he just smiled because they were so stupid he had guessed their secret. All their secrets.

His birthday. . . .

Birthdays and candles and paper hats. Where had that been? Maybe in a book once, not here. Birthdays were special days at Radbury. You never let them find out, but sometimes they did. They had found out about Tony Quincy, three years ago.

A shudder ran through Adam's body. On Tony Quincy's birthday the gym teacher himself had planned the hazing. A cake had arrived for Tony from home and the secret was out. That morning in the gym, Tony Quincy's classmates had told him they were going to take some pictures, and they had built a human pyramid with Tony on top, clinging to the water pipe to keep his balance. The coach stood out front with a camera. "Ready-set-go!" The boys under Tony had let go of his ankles and the pyramid was dismantled, except for Tony, who

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clung to the water pipe, shrieking. Adam had been in second form then, and his class had been drilling on the other side of the gym. The younger boys had glanced at Tony and at each other nervously. But their instructor had laughed heartily and finally the boys began to laugh too, and even Adam had found himself laughing, gasping a little, his hands pressed tightly against his mouth. After a few moments Tony had dropped from the ceiling with a shrill scream and had broken his ankle.

That night Mr. Griffith, the headmaster, had made a little speech about Tony's birthday, and about the joys of school spirit. Adam had stared at the headmaster's twinkling spectacles, and the little pink nose that could redden so sternly on other occasions. Slowly his eyes moved around the room and looked at each face, each pair of eyes intent and approving, drawing Mr. Griffith's meaningless words into their own emptiness. He knew with an absolute conviction what he had merely suspected. They were different. They were enemies.

Later, huddled under his bedclothes with a little flashlight Vince had given him, he had written letters home. They were never, never to acknowledge his birthday while he remained at Radbury.

The reveille bell broke upon him now. Directly after it, sounding unsteadily in the rain, came the eighth-form bugle. Peter Telby flung himself over the side of his bed and pulled on his socks.

"Hey, better come on, Adam. Swimming today."

There was a chlorinated indoor pool that stung the eyes. Besides, he was terrified of deep water. There was no reason for this, as he swam quite well, but it was there. Sheer terror, which he could barely hide.

"I'm not getting up."

"What?"

"My stomach hurts."

"Oh." Peter looked at him, then continued dressing. It was obvious his stomach never hurt.

"What's the matter?" It was Billy Saltenstone, his big in-

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quisitive face looking over from the third bed. "History Boy got a stomach-ache?"

Adam lay smiling at the ceiling. History Boy. He flexed the muscles in his arms under the cover, to remind himself that anytime he really wanted to, he could put an end to the nickname. It had started when Billy's father, himself a Radbury man, had sent football equipment for every member of his son's class. Adam had preferred studying for a history exam to going out for scrimmage. So—the name. *Smash*. Billy's fat face bloody. Who was History Boy now? He could smash them all. Hurt them. But he had to be careful because he might—No, of course he wouldn't do that. He pushed the thought violently from his mind.

He lay turned to the wall while the others made their noisy exit. The voice of the dorm master hurried them along.

"Eleven. Where's twelve? Who's missing? Who's that down there? Not Telby? Wenn? What's the matter with you, Wenn?"

"I have a stomach-ache, sir."

"A stomach-ache!"

"Yes, sir."

He tensed as Mr. McKeller's heavy tread came toward him. *Go ahead*. He nearly smiled. *Prove I haven't*. These flashes of superiority whipped through him at times, reminding him what fools they all were. All of them.

"Let's have a look at it, Wenn. Where does it hurt?"

"In the middle." *Fool*.

Brusque fingers probed at his abdomen.

"Hmm. Never had a bad appendix, did you, Wenn?"

"No, sir."

Mr. McKeller's eyes narrowed.

"Didn't fail any of your exams, did you, Wenn?"

"No, sir."

"Well—stay in bed till Dr. Corwin comes up. It may take a little while. He's in the infirmary till ten, and we have some eighth-form measles. Good heavens, you haven't got measles, have you?" He stepped back rapidly. "Have you ever had measles, Wenn?"

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"We had them when we were in kindergarten, sir."

"Good. Fine. Now just wait for Dr. Corwin."

The heavy tread, the closing door. He was alone.

He lay staring at the ceiling.

I am Adam Wenn.

My mother is Margaret.

My father is—

No. He gave his neck a sharp twist and looked down the row of eleven neatly made beds, standing like a file of soldiers' caskets, ready for a ceremonious burial. He put his hand up to his mouth and softly blew a bugle call. The caskets sank into the earth in a blaze of sunset. He, Colonel Adam Wenn, stood bareheaded as the last spadeful of dirt was tossed into place. At his side, a respectful voice said, "I'm sorry about the major, sir." He made no reply, but watched stony-eyed as the first white cross rose above the nearest mound, reading: "Major Edmond Wenn, U.S. Army Air Force, June 21, 1944." The dream slowly faded.

My name is Adam Wenn.

Again he withdrew sharply from the Voice. Because if it went on now, it might not stop in time. It might say *we*. *We had measles.*

He had a way of slipping underneath an unwelcome thought and he did it quickly. Margaret—that was what he must think about. Margaret and Edmond in Texas. At Ruggem Field. Edmond was a major and Margaret had written that they hoped to be in Washington, D.C., by Christmas.

Adam hunched himself up and opened the drawer of his night table and took out the box of letters he kept there. He pulled a sheet from a soiled envelope.

He knew the words by heart.

"This will certify that Vincent Henlein has satisfactorily completed the course in Defense Job Instructor Training, as authorized by the Labor Division, War Production Board."

He ran his finger across the name: Vincent Henlein. Then, eyes blank, he folded the certificate and put it away. The box was back in the drawer, the drawer closed.

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The Voice that had been lying there waiting for the right moment, said: "Yes, sir, we had measles in kindergarten."

We. We had measles.

A warning sound like the buzzing of a wasp went off inside of Adam. Instantly a chorus of thoughts arose protectively to drown out the sound. He thought of everything in his life in swift rotation. Margaret and Edmond in Texas. Vince like a picture on a war poster, with a riveting machine in his hand and his eyes staring through a glass and metal mask. Peter Telby sitting up in the next bed. Radbury Hall, the chapel, the library. Mr. Green—Greensie—the librarian, who might not be an enemy, but of course he was. All of it tumbling, tumbling, through his head. But it wasn't working this time. *We.* The buzzing grew a little shrill. Quick. There was another way. Stare at nothing, suspend your body, body and mind going slack together. Don't fight. Wait. Float with it into nowhere. He bore the almost painful moment of muscular relaxation. It was fine. It was working. He sank down. . . .

He opened his eyes with a start. There was a clatter at the other end of the room, smothered laughter and the sound of feet coming toward him, many feet. He sat up and stared at Mr. McKeller, leading the boys of the fifth form in a merry pilgrimage toward his bed. Mr. McKeller carried a square white-wrapped package, holding it before him as a page might carry a ring on a velvet cushion. Adam sat rigid with the ghastly realization.

"So you have a stomach-ache," Mr. McKeller's voice boomed out in cheery reproach. Behind him, milling around him, the boys tittered. Billy Saltenstone's face gleamed behind its freckles. Someone laughed on a high note.

"So you have a stomach-ache, Wenn."

Laughter. The package was on Adam's knees and he looked down at crushed white ribbon, through which a small card was looped. A hand came out and flipped the card over. Edmond. Edmond's dark thick scrawl. Happy birthday to Adam.

"Read it out loud!" One voice stood out in the chorus. It was Billy Saltenstone. "Read it! Read it!" Now he heard Peter

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Telby, and he looked up in sudden anger. Betrayal, Peter with all the rest! He felt his lips pull back over his teeth like an animal's.

"I think we all ought to say happy birthday to Adam, boys. What do you say?" Mr. McKeller's voice was still cheery.

Adam shrank back in his bed as they came at him. He felt the mattress sag, heard the cries in his ears. Fingers dug at him. "Happy birthday! Happy birthday!" His pajamas ripped in a wild tangle of arms and legs and faces. Through the swarm he glimpsed Mr. McKeller's round face, laughing and perspiring. Disgust made his stomach roll over. An upper classman's voice broke through from the far end of the dorm.

"Birthday?"

"Birthday!"

Adam fought back bitterly.

"Swimming today. He's going to swim for his birthday!"

"In his birthday suit!" someone screamed.

He remembered for the rest of his life the first touch of the dreaded water on his naked body. It was the high point of his struggle. After it, the deed had been done. He flailed his arms and kicked out with his legs with the aimless obedience to reflex of a chicken whose head has just been severed from its body. He rushed to the surface of the water and was flung downward again in a streak of bright silver bubbles. Up again. He tried to breathe, but as the water streamed across his face a hand leaped out. Down, down. He shot up once more, heard Mr. McKeller's voice. "Boys! Boys!" Something struck him in the face, something slippery and hard, someone's knee. This time he sank slowly and the water turned darker and darker around him, until it was the quiet blue of a night without stars.

XVII

"ADAM, where are you?"

The house was old and narrow and everything sounded hushed in it. Even his grandmother's voice, which was not old but rather strident, sounded muted coming down the stairwell.

She called three or four times, but he didn't answer. He sat rocking back and forth in the kitchen, watching Aunt Rose prepare a lobster for dinner. She always remembered that he liked lobster. Now she went about her work, saying nothing, but he had observed before this that whenever she was disturbed, her hand went up to touch the silver brooch she always wore. It had her initials on it. R.E.B. For a moment she looked at Adam, her finger tracing the letters on the brooch. He knew that she wished he would answer his grandmother, but even Aunt Rose's kindness and his desire to please her could not make him go upstairs. He had seen Mr. Griffith, the headmaster, coming up the front walk. So he simply rocked in the kitchen chair and thought about other things. He thought about the house. Strange how much he had liked the house here in Boston only last Easter. Only last Easter he had still pretended that the little brown door leading down to the kitchen had been the door to Alice in Wonderland.

"Adam, come up here at once!"

He missed a beat in the rhythm of his rocking this time. Her voice had grown commanding.

"If I went with you," Aunt Rose offered, "just part way, maybe, to the top of the stairs."

He shrugged but got up from the chair. As he mounted the steps he felt Aunt Rose's warm presence behind him. Again, quickly, he shrugged.

"I'll go by myself now."

"All right, dear."

At the landing he started past the old framed copy of the Declaration of Independence. It was so old the paper looked

burned around the edges. He caught his own silhouette in the glass and paused. A lock of hair stuck out at the top of his head and he put up a hand to press it down. But his hand stopped in mid-air. Behind his own reflection in the glass was another exactly like it.

Two. Two of him. . . .

For a paralyzed moment he stood with parted lips and stared into the glass. A little moan came up from his throat and was choked off as he ducked his head and turned to lean back, trembling, against the dark hallway wall. In the front parlor he heard their voices, caught meaningless snatches of words.

"Two," he whispered. "There were two."

Then suddenly his grandmother was there, wrenching the thought from him. He followed her stiffly down the hall. His grandfather, sitting at the parlor window, turned to nod at him, then glanced out at the street again. His grandmother went to seat herself on the sofa beside Mr. Griffith, the headmaster.

"Well!" cried Mr. Griffith. His eyeglasses twinkled like snow crystals. "Adam!" He had never called him that before, always Wenn. "I must say you look none the worse for your little—ah—mishap."

Adam waited in the doorway.

"Aren't you going to shake hands with Mr. Griffith, darling?" Sometimes his grandmother sounded exactly like Margaret. "Mr. Griffith interrupted his vacation just to see that you were all right."

Adam waited.

"Now, Adam!" Mr. Griffith was all jolly exclamation points. As Mr. McKeller had been. "What's this nonsense we hear, not coming back to Radbury? Indeed, I thought we'd learned a great deal more than that about good sportsmanship at Radbury, eh?"

"I don't see it's so sporting to drown a boy," remarked his grandfather. "Especially a boy that hates water to begin with."

"Mr. McVeigh!"

"William!"

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"I admit the joke went a bit far." Mr. Griffith's voice was hurt now. "But what kind of a place would Radbury be for our lads without a little laugh now and then? And if you could understand what the war has done to us—three instructor replacements in a year! Three! Mr. McKeller was one of them, of course. Just not suited. Dear me, no." To Adam he said: "Mr. McKeller won't be there when you come to Radbury in the fall. How's that?"

"I'm not going back there," said Adam.

His grandfather said: "I told you."

"Mr. McVeigh! If we were to take every whim of our boys seriously—why, I don't know what!"

His voice went on, but Adam leaned against the doorjamb and didn't listen. The voices were mere interruptions to a more important thought. What had it been? He stood frowning in annoyance. Now they had done it, had wrested the one important thought from him, to sit squabbling about some unimportant thing already settled and over. Angrily Adam glanced back at them.

"You forget," Mr. Griffith was saying heatedly, "that we took your grandson into Radbury when four other schools, quite inferior may I add, had distinctly refused—"

"I don't think we'll talk about that just now," said his grandfather. "Adam, why don't you go back to the kitchen, maybe get our Aunt Rose to bake us some cookies?"

Adam turned and went back down the dim hallway. At the Declaration of Independence he hesitated; then his eyes passed blankly over the glass and he went on down the steps.

"Better now, dear?" asked Aunt Rose.

"Yes." Overhead he heard his grandmother taking Mr. Griffith to the front door. Through the old-fashioned heating vent her voice came down quite audibly.

"I'm so sorry." Margaret's voice now, exactly like Margaret. "Just as soon as we get in touch with Mrs. Wenn, I'll let you know. Imagine, on furlough at a time like this! But I know that Margaret—that's Mrs. Wenn—will write in a day or two. She always does. And just as soon as we hear—"

I AM ADAM

Adam put his hands over his ears and sat down in the rocking-chair. He moved slowly back and forth, back and forth, releasing his ears after he had heard the reverberation of the front door closing.

If only he never had to listen to their stupid voices again! Fools! Oh, he could tell them things if he wanted to. Things to frighten them. And he could hurt them. He could do something awful. He knew how. He knew.

His breath came quickly. He had been very close, very close today. He had been nearly all the way. Soon, he thought, very soon.

I am Adam Wenn.

My mother is Margaret.

My father is Vince. . . .

For the four dreary years he had made no demand. There had seemed none to make. Now, tonight, at his grandfather's table he said: "Grandfather?"

"Yes?"

"Please send me home to my father."

"Now, Adam." It broke from his grandmother's lips before anyone could speak. "You know we can't locate them. Now, darling, don't be difficult. As soon as we hear from them—"

"My father," Adam said distinctly. "Vince."

His eyes moved to meet hers, and some instinct told him to sit unmoving until she moved.

"Oh." Her hands edged upward, helpless, Margaret's hands.

An hour later his grandfather telephoned for plane reservations. It was a night he would remember. Vince's shocked voice across three thousand miles of telephone wire, his grandmother's tears, her wrung fingers.

"But he uses their name, her husband pays all his bills. What will they say? William, we can't."

Adam packed into his suitcase the things he had hardly unpacked. For the first time that he could remember, he was moving forward. Before in the rare moments when he had found himself groping for a conscious view of his existence, all he had

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glimpsed was a swamp. He had spent these years in a gray limbo, aware that he must never look back, while the prospect of moving forward had seemed like hurrying up an escalator that moved backward at the same speed.

Tonight, though, it was different. It had started yesterday. It had started with the cold blue stars at the bottom of the chlorinated pool at Radbury Hall. They blinked in front of him now, beckoning. He must move at last.

All the way across the sky, the sureness was with him. Wherever he was going, there was a reason at last. There was a reason.

The plane touched ground and Adam remained in his seat, staring out the window. The approach to Los Angeles had been very dull. Once—had it been Vince?—someone had described the night flight into Los Angeles as a black bowl filled with lights, but now there was the blackout.

As he stepped off the plane he saw the tall grasshopper figure waiting by the gate. They had been scheduled to arrive at six and it was after midnight. They had been lucky, the people around him had frequently repeated, to have come all the way without being bumped by some priority.

He tried to think of Vince waiting for six hours. It roused little emotion in him. Vince was not what he had come for. No, there was something else.

He allowed Vince to pick him up as though he were still a small boy. He walked with him to the luggage pickup, then to the lunchroom, where Vicki emerged from the huddled, smoky group and shook his hand. Vicki? No. He looked at her, even smiled at her, but he had not come for Vicki either.

He slept a little on the drive up to Los Pepinos, and listened a little.

"He's dead asleep, poor little bastard."

"I know, darling." Vicki was driving.

"I felt lousy when I saw him. I've been a hell of a father."

"True. But there's no point beating your breast about it now. Anyway, some part of it had to come from him."

She knew. She still knew everything.

I AM ADAM

Adam kept his eyes tightly closed.

"Adam."

They were home. He got out of the car. It was dark, but he could make out a vague outline of the house at Los Pepinos against the night sky, and the darkness was not quite as frightening that way. He touched his eyes and was suddenly wide awake. He made out the edge of the cactus garden, familiar as an old dream.

"This way. Blackout, you know." Vince guided him by the shoulder along the gravel path. "Here's the first step."

"I see it. I can go by myself."

Vicki laughed.

"You forget, he's eleven now."

"I'm twelve."

"Sorry. Of course. Twelve."

Ahead of them she put on a small light in the vestibule. It sprang out into the darkness like a beacon, making the red door garish. Adam blinked, but trudged toward the light without hesitation. He was here. This was a part of the pattern. Vicki stood waiting, and he glanced into her eyes and caught their almost imperceptible narrowing. Danger. But a quick smile chased the other expression from her face and it might never have been there.

"You can have your room if you like," she said.

They were all inside now and Vince was closing the door.

"My room?"

"Oh, Vicki, not that silly room with the mirrors." Vince's voice was impatient. "That's kid stuff. What does he want that nonsense for?"

"I just thought he might."

Vicki still smiled at him.

"I'd like it."

He didn't know why he had said it. The words were there and he spoke them, and felt neither regret nor alarm. It was meant.

Vicki stood aside so Vince could start up the stairs with Adam's suitcase.

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"Whatever you like, son. I still think it's a ridiculous room." Adam started up after him, silent.

"Hungry, Adam?" Vicki asked.

"No, thank you."

"I've some hamburgers ready to throw on. You sure?"

"Yes."

"Got your toothbrush, then? If you don't feel like unpacking now, there's a new one in the bathroom. A green one, still in Cellophane."

Something stopped him in his tracks. Like a huge hand reaching around his middle and jerking him to a standstill.

Behind him Vicki said curiously: "What's the matter?"

He shook his head. At the top of the stairs he followed his father to the open doorway. Vince had switched on the light and was bending over the bed, unstrapping the suitcase. Adam stood on the threshold. He saw Vince pulling out his pajamas, heard him say: "This'll do. Just something to sleep in to-night."

The Voice Inside whispered some unintelligible thing.

Adam's eyes moved across the shimmering gray glass walls. The room gleamed back at him, its hidden lights casting the old shadows.

"We have an extra toothbrush, Adam. It's—"

"I know."

It came almost harshly, and Vince straightened.

"You okay, Adam?"

He nodded.

"Pretty knocked out, I guess. I'll get out of here. Have a good night's sleep, son."

"I will, sir."

Passing him on the threshold, Vince touched the top of Adam's head.

"Think we can get used to saying Dad before long?"

Adam nodded.

"See you in the morning, son."

"Okay."

He stood motionless until Vince's footsteps had faded.

"Go in," whispered the Voice in its sly way. "Go in. It's time."

Adam drew in his breath and stepped into the room. He closed the door behind him, catching the dull reflection of his own movements in the glass opposite. Something stirred in him now, like dust rising, dust that had lain still for a long time, thickening. . . .

He walked over to the bed and began to remove his clothing. He folded each piece neatly as he had been taught, but he moved automatically, his body tight as a wound spring. His hand reached out to pull down the cover and stopped, drew back. He turned and crossed to the door and walked bare-footed down the hall to the bathroom.

Above the bathroom window was a thick blackout curtain. It was secret. The whole house was secret, still, dark.

Waiting.

He stared at the medicine cabinet.

Open it.

He opened it and found the green toothbrush and looked at it with curiously blank eyes. He removed the Cellophane and brushed his teeth.

All the way back to his room something fluttered weirdly at the edges of his mind. Was it the Voice? The Voice, rising to the very top of his thoughts, because everything was so near now?

He climbed into bed, leaving a small light on. The tiny night-light in the dorm at Radbury had saved him many a bad moment. But now, suddenly, even with the light on, he felt ill and thought he was going to vomit. He sprang to the edge of the bed. But the urge subsided and he lay back, sweat crawling across his scalp. He closed his eyes.

Presently he heard someone whisper: "Adam."

He lay very still.

"Adam," the whisper said.

He kept his eyes closed and held his breath.

"Open your eyes."

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He obeyed as though he had been hypnotized. The room sprang alive, the blackout curtains stirring.

"I'm over here."

Adam sat up. There was a low wicker chair in the corner, a chair he had once brought down from the attic.

Sitting in the chair, smiling gently at him, was Jeremy.

Adam sat unmoving. Then he managed unevenly: "Jeremy. Jeremy."

"Sshh. They don't know I'm here."

"They don't—"

"But you knew I'd be here, didn't you?"

Numbly, Adam shook his head.

"I—I knew someone would be here. Someone—"

"Oh, you knew very well it would be me, and you oughtn't to have used my toothbrush."

"Your—" Adam stopped. "The—green one. The green one was yours." Now he remembered. Now he knew why something had stopped him cold on the stairs when Vicki had mentioned the green toothbrush. For another moment he stared at his brother; then as full realization swept over him, he turned with a choked cry to bury his face in the pillow. After a moment he heard a sigh close to his ear and slowly turned his cheek against the linen. But Jeremy still sat in the wicker chair, rocking slowly and watching him, the faint smile still curling his lips.

XVIII

LATER, looking back, he realized that the sheer solitude of those first weeks at Los Pepinos was all that had saved them. Vince worked fifteen miles away, leaving the house early and returning long after dark. Vicki, with her boundless energy, was an air-raid warden and a nurse's aide and spent most of her time at Durango at the military hospital.

And so they were relatively free.

I AM ADAM

From the start one thing was clear to Adam. A dozen times a day came the quickening heartbeat, the fearful reminder. *They must not know.*

In the beginning Jeremy came only to the mirror room. Here they spoke cautiously, but the disturbing thing was that after Jeremy had gone, Adam could never, by the most careful searching of his mind, recall anything Jeremy had said that would answer any of the questions.

For the questions came, high on the heels of that first shock of acceptance. They were there, crowding him, absorbing him, tumbling over each other in growing, leaping anxiety. Jeremy. Jeremy had come back. . . .

Yet something held the questions back. So many other facts of his life had been bizarre, disconnected. Why not accept this as he had accepted the rest? Why, in the newness of their relationship, risk offending his brother, perhaps losing him?

It was not until weeks after their first meeting, when the house was quite empty and safe, that Jeremy ventured after him to the basement, where the books were. The very act of walking so brazenly through the house together emboldened Adam. He glanced at his brother's clothes. As usual, Jeremy wore an outfit borrowed from his own wardrobe. Adam didn't mind this. In fact he frequently marveled at his brother's skill in folding things back into drawers as though they had never been worn. But—didn't Jeremy have any clothes of his own?

He opened his mouth to ask, then closed it again.

Wait.

They chose their books, *Tarzan* and *Swiss Family Robinson*. Silently Adam allowed his brother to take the lead, and followed him upstairs again to the comparative safety of the attic. Here they sat close together reading. Adam stole surreptitious glances at his brother's profile. It was amazing how much alike they still looked. Almost more alike than ever. Straight black hair and brows, complexion faintly sallow, with the same familiar slant to the eyes and height to the cheekbone. Surely there should have been some change, some difference to indicate all the years they had been apart. Once more the questions

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crowded to Adam's lips. But there was something oddly forbidding about his brother's face.

For another week he held his silence. Then one day Jeremy followed him out of the house, treading behind him on the road leading down to the beach. Adam found himself searching the overhead road as they descended, tiny hairs rising along his arms at the thought of discovery. He looked at Jeremy, but his brother's face showed no sign of fear.

Why not?

They reached the edge of the sand and Adam turned swiftly.

"Jeremy?"

"Yes?"

"Where do you sleep at night?"

"Why, I—just sleep."

"But where?"

"In the attic."

"There isn't any bed in the attic."

"No bed?" There was a sharp little silence. "So what? I sleep on the couch. The old wicker couch that matches the chair in your room. That's where I sleep."

"Every night?"

"Yes."

"Did you—always?"

"What do you mean?" Jeremy seemed to peer closely at him.

Adam felt his face flushing and the rest of the questions tried to scurry back into his head, unasked. But he knew that if only the questions were asked and answered, then a new and wonderful kind of freedom would ensue. He urgently wanted that freedom.

Doggedly he said: "I mean the four years. Where were you the four years?"

Jeremy smiled.

"I want to know." Adam's voice grew a little shrill.

"You do know."

"No I don't!"

"I was in prison."

"In—"

"Not exactly in prison," Jeremy amended quickly. "I didn't mean to say prison. It was more like a school. Not your kind of school. A reform school."

Adam stood speechless. There they were, the pieces he had wanted so badly to put together to form a whole. Not a perfect whole. There were cracks in it here and there. But he had learned long ago that no reality was without its cracks. The things that Jeremy had said made sufficient logic, and that was all that was important. Reform school. He remembered now that Edmond had frequently mentioned reform school and various boys who had done bad things and had been sent there.

He knelt suddenly and picked up a handful of sand. The small scar seemed to blaze to momentary life below his thumb. The scar. The scar Jeremy had made.

"How did you get out of reform school?" he inquired, not looking up at his brother.

"I escaped."

"But don't they try to find you?"

"They would if they knew I was here with you."

Adam looked up swiftly.

"I'll never tell."

"I know."

"I'll never let them know you're with me."

Jeremy nodded.

"Maybe you'll be with me forever and nobody will ever know but us."

"Nobody but us," Jeremy repeated.

Adam glanced down at the sand in his palm and let it dribble slowly through his fingers. There were other things he had wanted to ask, but suddenly they seemed unimportant. Where do you hide? What do you eat, how do you know when I'm alone and you can come? It was enough to know that the answers would be there. He knew it now.

The low triple honk of a horn roused him. He got to his feet. From here could be seen the tops of the cars that rounded the upper road going past Los Pepinos. There were few cars now because of the gas rationing. He watched the top of a

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gray sedan go by and disappear, and he turned swiftly to Jeremy.

"Quick. Maybe that's Vicki."

"You better go see."

"But you! You better hide!"

"She won't see me."

"But—"

"She won't see me if you don't tell." Jeremy's black eyes held the peculiar half-smiling glint. "Go see if it's her."

Adam nodded. He took a few steps up from the beach, then turned back.

"Will you be here later?"

"Maybe."

Adam set out on his bare feet, going up the road to the house. Vicki would be waiting, would be sitting across the table from him in a few minutes asking what sort of day he had had. He would tell her he had read a book or built a castle in the sand, and she would tell him she was glad he hadn't been lonely. For now he knew that no one, not even Vicki, was omnipotent. Even Vicki, who knew everything, didn't know his innermost secret.

"Adam!"

At the top of the road he looked up and for a moment was blinded by the sun. Then as he blinked, he made out the gray car parked on the drive near the house.

"Adam!"

She stood motionless, a slender pale figure, hands clasped tightly at her breast.

Margaret.

She flew toward him. Involuntarily he shrank back, watching as he might have watched a figure in a play, tripping toward the audience on high foolish heels. Except that this figure did not stop at the edge of the stage. It came to him, flung its arms about him in a smothering embrace. But even as he breathed in the warm familiar fragrance, he was aware of the real Adam standing off and watching them with blank eyes.

"My son!" Margaret cried. "My boy, my great big son!"

Now she cupped his face in her hands and turned it up so that he stared into her eyes. Dark tear-filled eyes, with the tragic smudges beneath them.

"Darling baby, it's me, it's your mother! Oh, how you've grown! Let me look at you!" A smile brightened her face, then seemed to crumple. "Adam, my little son, did they really think they could take you away from me? Oh, I—I want to cry. But I won't, darling, don't you worry. I have to think of you now, mustn't I? And I will, darling, I will! I'll be the best mother in the world from now on!"

He stood stiffly before her, aware that some response must be expected of him, some word.

"Where—where's Edmond?"

He knew instantly by the look that cleared her face that she had misunderstood.

"Oh, I'm so glad you asked. Don't you worry, darling, he'll be there. You'll have both of us. I've come to take you home. For good. Home will be wherever we are, won't it, Adam? Wherever the three of us are?"

Protest rose sharply in him. But how to tell her? How to say it?

"Mother, if Edmond is—"

"Little worry-wart! I tell you, he'll be there! He hasn't deserted you, darling, he just couldn't get away. He's busy with a great big war. And, Adam—we made it! We're going to live in Washington!" Quite suddenly she seemed to straighten, and her voice grew brisk. "Now. Who's home with you, darling?"

He shook his head.

"What do you mean? No one? They left you here alone?"

"They had to." He tried to explain, tried to tell her that Vince was at work, Vicki at the hospital—necessary things. That he didn't mind being alone. But her voice cut across his, high with anger.

"And to think my own father sent you here! My own father!"

"I wanted to come."

"Of course you wanted to come! You wanted to get away from school. But you're only a baby, you couldn't have realized

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they'd send you here, to this crazy place!" As she looked at his face, a new note crept into her voice. "You didn't think they'd send you here, Adam? You—you didn't?"

"Yes," he said, his voice very low, "I did."

As they faced each other the whole thing became unreal to him once more. A curtain might have dropped between them, making her face a mask, a stupid half-seen mask. He could not believe this was Margaret, Margaret, come to take him away.

"But, Adam"—her voice shook now—"you do want to come with me, don't you?"

He stood silent and helpless before the fear in her eyes. He wanted to run, to turn and run from this unreal Margaret with the desperate eyes.

Behind him came a new sound, the sound of an approaching car. It came closer, pulled up with a scattering of gravel, and stopped directly behind him. He did not have to turn. He saw by Margaret's face that Vicki had come home.

The car door slammed and there was a step on the gravel. Vicki's voice said: "Thanks, Annie, I'll be ready at noon tomorrow," and the car pulled away.

"Hello, Margaret."

His mother nodded, her face white.

"Adam, why didn't you invite your mother inside?"

Vicki was touching his shoulder. Their eyes met as she went past him and automatically he turned to follow her. Up the path, up the steps, Margaret's heels making their little clatter at his side.

"Let's go into the living-room," Vicki said. "It will be cooler there."

Inside the room, she turned to them, her eyes remote.

"Sit down, won't you, Margaret? Vince ought to be home around seven. Can I offer you something? A cold drink? Something to eat? After that I'll leave you and Adam alone for your visit."

Margaret shook her head.

"I can't wait for Vince. My plane leaves at eight. That will just give us time to get back to Burbank and I have to return

the car first. It's only hired for a few hours. We'll have to leave almost immediately."

"We?" The remote eyes darkened.

"Adam and I. I've come to take him home."

"I see. And where might home be, Margaret?"

"It will be in Washington, from now on."

"Oh. How nice for you and Edmond."

"And Adam. Didn't you get my telegram?"

"I believe Vince got it last week."

"Then I don't understand. Why didn't he do as I asked? Send Adam on to me?"

Adam's eyes slid from one face to the other, like the eyes of a viewer at a tennis match. Now he watched as Vicki bent and helped herself to a cigarette from a box on the coffee table. She rarely smoked and there was an awkwardness to her movements. But as she straightened, the awkwardness disappeared. She was tall, stern, controlled. Beside her, Margaret looked almost childlike.

"We decided against it, Margaret. We decided Adam was a boy with feelings, not a little bag of bones to be shipped around the country at your whim. Does that answer your question?"

His eyes moved to his mother's face. Anger blazed there.

"How dare you, Vicki! When it was you, when it was Vince who—" She broke off, making a visible effort to match Vicki's control, and turned to Adam. "Where are your things? Where is your room?"

"If I were you," Vicki said from across the room, "I wouldn't ask him that, Margaret. Because you aren't taking him anywhere unless Vince says so."

"You can't stop me."

"Oh, no?"

"I have custody of my child."

"You'll either wait for Vince or leave—alone."

"Adam," Margaret said rapidly, "we'll leave without your things, if we must. I'll buy you new clothes, a new suitcase, all new things. How would you like that?"

SUMMER INTO AUTUMN

"I doubt that bribery will convince him, Margaret. Adam is a pretty bright little boy. Why not try some tears? Maybe that will do it. Or maybe you'll see what you're doing and have the common decency to cut it out."

"Adam," Margaret said, trembling, "come!"

He stood rigid, hands clenched behind him.

"Adam, you'll do as I say! I'm your mother, I'm still your mother, I still love you most no matter what you did—"

"Margaret!"

"They can't keep you from me, no matter what you did—"

Vicki seemed to spring across the room. Her hands were on Margaret's shoulders, the knuckles white. "You say that once more and I'll shake you till your bones rattle!" Her voice was low and tense. "This is his chance to be a normal little boy, Margaret, and you aren't going to take it away from him, do you hear? You and Edmond talked about the shame, the publicity, you stuck him away in a school for four years, four years when he needed you most! Oh, don't get me wrong, we're as guilty as you are—if only by the sin of omission! But Vince and I aren't going to go on with it. You want him now, only so we can't have him. Well, that isn't reason enough to go on crucifying a little boy. You can't have Adam, do you understand? This time Vince and I will fight for him."

Adam moved back until he touched the wall behind him. He leaned there, shutting his eyes tightly. Back in Boston on his grandmother's porch was a strange plant with long green tendrils that curled up swiftly when they were touched. Now his mind was like the plant, shrinking back into itself at the touch of their voices. At the touch of phrases he dared not grasp. The very room seemed to move, circling slowly around him. He heard Margaret cry to him: "Come with me, Adam! Come!"

But the curtain had fallen once more and her voice was utterly unreal to him. Only the nausea, the sickening circling of the room, were real.

"Now you ought to be delighted!" he heard Vicki say fiercely. "Look at him, look what you've done to him!"

I AM ADAM

There was a dim little silence. Then: "Adam?" It was his mother, her voice faltering. "Adam, what is it? What's the matter with you?"

He pressed harder against the wall, his lids still tightly closed.

"Adam, answer me!" Her voice rose, going shrill now. "Darling, I didn't mean it, I didn't mean what I said! I shouldn't have brought it up. I—I've been ill! Adam, I've been very ill!"

"For God's sake, spare him that!"

"I'm sorry, I—"

"You'd better go, Margaret." There was no pity in Vicki's voice, no forgiveness. "He'll be fine. He was fine before you came and he'll be fine after you go."

"All right," Margaret whispered, "I'll go."

But he knew that she stood waiting, waiting for him. At last he heard her stumble across the room into the hall. There was the clickety-clack of her silly heels on the steps, the ruffling of the gravel. The car door opened and the motor started. Wheels rolled out to the road.

Adam opened his eyes. It came like the whimper of a hurt animal.

"Mother—"

Now Vicki's voice was deep with pity.

"Margaret is gone, Adam."

"No!" He made his way across the room, hurried to the steps and clattered down them. "Mother!"

He was too late. He knew that he was too late, but he cried to the empty road: "Wait! Wait, Mother, I'll go with you!"

Slowly his outstretched hands fell to his sides. He stood at the edge of the road alone. A toad came out of the grass and hopped toward him. Stiffly, Adam squatted down and looked at it. The toad looked back with wary, luminous eyes, then hopped away and left him alone again.

There was a strange, bitter taste in his mouth. The taste of earned freedom. Today two separate ghosts had been laid, and now they were free of all but the most remote of threats. Free to be together—he and Jeremy. To make new explorations into

SUMMER INTO AUTUMN

cellar and attic, to seek out the road that curved in summer splendor to the beach and the sea. Now they could race safely across the sand, spotting enemy submarines on the empty whitecaps, building their castles of sand and watching them tumble.

Bitter. Bitter and cruel—the taste of their freedom.

XIX

HE ALWAYS thought of them as Jeremy's years, those years in which they grew and learned and managed to survive the constant threat of discovery. Years spiked with incidents, like the tall weathered poles that marked the tides at Los Pepinos beach.

The wound of Margaret's visit became only another scar, taking its place in the limbo of a painful past. Her letters began to come again, postmarked Washington, very remote, very far away.

Or perhaps everything was remote to Adam now, except Jeremy.

Jeremy proved to be a stimulating companion. That summer they grew brown and several inches taller, going about their endless rounds of games at the edge of the ocean. Innumerable small worlds began to open for Adam, worlds he would never have dared enter by himself. The world of imagery—for Jeremy never saw a cloud that did not resemble a face or a boat or a naked lady, never held a leaf in his hand without discovering some unlikely panorama in its tiny lines. And the world of adventure. "Don't worry, Adam, you can jump, you're wearing a parachute!" And Adam would forget his fear of height, closing his eyes and leaping from a ten-foot sand cliff with never a scratch.

Autumn approached, the California kind of autumn that never seemed sharp enough or brilliant enough for their Eastern blood.

"We'd better register Adam for school."

Vicki's remark gave a tinge of finality to the summer.

"You might phone the school tomorrow," Vince replied, "and see if they're open for registration."

"You know, Vince, I was just thinking." Vicki set a dish on the table and sat down to join them at dinner. "Maybe we can send Adam to the school near your factory."

"All the way up at Enrico Beach? But why, Vicki?"

"Oh, it might be fun." Vicki's eyes moved across the table as though she were checking its items, then lifted to Vince's. "You could drive him up with you every morning and he could take the bus home. I hear it's not a bad school."

"I don't get it," Vince said. "You mean—"

"Most of the kids at that school come from the trailer city near the plant, don't they, Vince? They're newcomers. Transients."

There was a pause. Adam saw an odd little flicker, almost like pain, cross his father's face and vanish quickly.

"Of course. You're right, Vicki. Of course."

"You mean I have to go to school way up there?" Adam asked in surprise.

"You'll like the kids much better," Vicki said calmly. "They've traveled, just like you. It'll be much more fun getting to know them. Now let's finish dinner and weed the rest of that victory garden before sundown."

Later, greatly puzzled, he talked it over with Jeremy.

"Oh, don't be so dumb," his brother said with a shrug. "It's because the kids around here might remember."

"Remember?"

"About us."

Adam's lips parted slowly, and a peculiar shortness of breath overtook him as Jeremy's cool dark eyes gazed back into his. Sometimes Jeremy did this, said something. Something—he shouldn't say. Adam never knew how to cope with these moments. He lay back and clamped his lips shut again, the blood beating hard in his temples. No, it was not the first time Jeremy had spoken out, had tried to push him over the edge of that little forbidden corner of his mind.

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Presently he turned toward the wall, without so much as another glance at Jeremy. He knew better than to take him to task for his cruelty. For when Jeremy sensed an advantage, he usually pushed even further, even closer to that queer, dark brink.

Jeremy had become more and more contrary, in many other ways as well. There were times when Adam sat waiting for him after school for hours, willing with all his strength for his brother to appear, searching after him in corners of the attic and in coves along the beach. The more he searched, the stronger became his conviction that Jeremy had vanished once more, perhaps for good. But each time when he trudged back to his room, Jeremy would be sitting there, smiling mockingly, as if he had been waiting all along.

Yes, it had taken a long time for Adam to learn to take his brother's queer habits in stride. Finally he had even brought Jeremy to accept a kind of routine, so that he knew, at least, that he would find him every night in the mirror room. At these times Jeremy would be more agreeable. They would talk about Adam's day at school, and Jeremy's day at home, discuss a current adventure of the Rover Boys or read over the latest letter from Margaret.

"Mother is coming here for Christmas?" Jeremy asked once, in surprise.

"No. I got another letter. She can't come till Easter."

"Oh?"

"He's coming too."

"Edmond?" For the first time Adam saw alarm on his brother's face. "Coming here?"

"I guess they'll stay at the house, and we'll go up there."

"Not me!"

Adam looked at him curiously.

"Don't you ever want to see Mother again?"

"Not if he's there. He'd send me back."

"I know."

"He'd find me even if I was hiding."

"I know."

"He'd find anybody that did anything wrong."

Adam nodded solemnly.

Yet when Easter finally came and Vince put him on the train for Los Angeles, where Margaret would meet him, he was secretly relieved to leave Jeremy behind, with his newly unpredictable ways and deeds. Too, he had worried fitfully about losing Jeremy at the depot, or the possibility that Jeremy might have trouble locating the house in Beverly Hills. Of course there was the white begonia lawn, still unforgettable, to mark the house. But it would have been a risk.

He glanced at his reflection in the train window. He looked different already, with an alteration far more subtle than that of his crisp new clothes and unaccustomed tie. As he had stepped onto the train, he had become the boy Margaret and Edmond would be expecting. A rather formal, unbending sort of boy. A boy they would be proud of. Even his nails had undergone a thorough manicure, and his hands looked strange. He glanced at the little scar. He had hardly noticed the scar lately, he had been so busy. Anyway, the Adam who lived in blue jeans and sneakers at Los Pepinos was so sunbrowned that the scar hardly showed.

He couldn't seem to make himself comfortable in his seat. Finally he took out one of his comic books and leafed through it. Most of the pictures were brightly colored scenes of men shooting at one another. One showed a man committing suicide by tying a string to the trigger of a long-barreled shotgun and jerking it with his toe. Adam thought of the long gleaming barrel of the squirrel gun that hung behind the kitchen door at Los Pepinos, Vicki's father's old gun. Vince had promised that on his thirteenth birthday Adam could learn to shoot with the rifle if he wanted to. Then maybe some day they would go hunting together. At first Vince had looked disturbed, almost angry, when Adam had asked about using the rifle. Then Vicki had stepped in and Vince had relented. . . .

"Adam! Adam, here we are!"

Behind Margaret, Edmond's uniform pushed toward him.

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His mother crushed him to her, then quickly straightened. "Ed, will you look at him? How big he's grown?"

"Hello, Adam."

He shook Edmond's proffered hand.

"Glad to see Los Angeles again?"

"Yes, sir."

Queer how easily it slipped back when it was expected of him. Sir.

"Darling, Edmond and I are starved. Even these little up-state trains run late these days, don't they?"

"I guess they do."

"Well, let's go right to the hotel for lunch. We're staying at the Bel Aqua, darling. The house is rented, you know, to some Army friends of ours."

"A lieutenant general," said Edmond. "They want to buy the house, as a matter of fact. We might sell. We don't need quite so much room these days."

They found a cab. At the hotel Margaret showed Adam to his room, adjoining theirs through the bath. Edmond had waited downstairs, and had a table for them in the dining-room.

"I've ordered," he said. "Grabbed the waiter while I could. It's so damn crowded with these GI's. We're having beef. That all right?"

"Fine, Ed, just fine."

"You like beef, I suppose, Adam?"

"Yes, sir."

"Glad to see you've some manners, anyway. Let's see. You'll be thirteen before long. That right, Adam?"

"Yes, sir."

"We weren't exactly pleased when you left Radbury. I suppose you know that."

Adam was saved a reply by the appearance of their lunch. Later in the meal, when Edmond again broached the subject of his schooling, Margaret pushed her plate away and interrupted to ask if he had a match.

"You've hardly touched your food and here you are with those damn cigarettes," Edmond exclaimed.

"I'm just not awfully hungry."

"And you never will be as long as you smoke those infernal things one after another."

Now Margaret said with a smile: "You're probably right, darling. I'll try to cut down."

It wasn't until later that he realized she had provoked Edmond deliberately to shield *him*. Grownups were so strange. He knew he would never understand them.

Margaret took him sightseeing in those few days. He saw little of his stepfather except at mealtimes. Now Adam understood when Margaret would remark: "Now let's see, Ed. Today you wanted to stop up at the Commissioner's office, didn't you? See your old friends? Adam and I will take in the museum, I think. We don't want to clutter up your day."

Once, in a light mood, Edmond handed Adam a dollar.

"You might want to buy your mother a soda."

"Thank you, sir."

Edmond looked at him for a long moment, then shook his head.

"I just can't understand how a smart kid like you could quit a place like Radbury."

Across the room, Margaret's perfume atomizer gave a sharp wheeze, but this time it was unavoidable.

"Why, there are boys who go from Radbury right into West Point! The army is quite a place for young officers, Adam. The world's at their feet."

Adam looked mutely down at the rug.

"There are kids who'd give their eyeteeth to get into Radbury. They don't take just anybody, you know. The Commissioner had to pull plenty of strings to get you in there. He was certainly disappointed when you left Radbury after he pulled all those strings, Adam. Really disappointed." His voice lowered. "It wasn't easy to get you in there, Adam. Maybe you're too young to appreciate what—"

"They were crazy about Adam at Radbury!" Margaret's

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voice cut in swiftly. "If they weren't crazy about him they wouldn't have made such a fuss when he was leaving. Why, Griffith himself came to Mamma's."

"Mr. Griffith, Meg."

"Oh, what's the difference?"

"What do you mean, what's the difference? You make him sound like a teacher in some kindergarten!"

Margaret shrugged. "Same thing to me. Let's go, Adam. I'm all ready."

The incident came back to him two days later when he was on the train returning to Los Pepinos, his visit ended. He remembered Edmond's lowered voice, Margaret's sharp interruption. Always, they cut off their words just as they neared that little edge of his thoughts. He wondered what would happen if once—just once—a voice continued on over the precipice.

XX

"I NEVER THOUGHT one boy could wear jeans out so fast," Vicki said. She smiled at Adam over the patch she was adding. But he looked back at her guardedly. Why did she say that, about one boy? Did she suspect there were two?

"Those things must stretch." Vince looked up over the top of his newspaper. "Adam's grown like a beanstalk and they still fit. How do you figure that?"

"He's got taller, not fatter."

"But the way his chest and arms have developed!"

"He doesn't wear his jeans on his chest and arms, darling."

"Oh. I didn't know that."

"Darling, you're such a nice idiot," Vicki laughed.

Adam relaxed. He knew a lot more, approaching fourteen, than he had at twelve. For one thing, he understood Vicki better, at least in her relationship with his father. Vicki needed to see into every secret corner of another person's mind and Vince let her, so they were happy together. He felt almost in-

dulgent toward his father, but to Adam it would have been unendurable to have someone picking and prying at secrets he himself hardly dared disturb.

"It's nearly ten, Adam," Vicki remarked. "You want to be real peppy tomorrow for graduation practice. How about bed?"

"Oh, all they do is get in line and march around the auditorium." But a sudden yawn came from nowhere, bringing one of his rare smiles. "Guess you're right."

Upstairs, he put on the lights in his room and stood looking at himself in one of the mirrored walls. It was true that his body had begun a remarkable development. He slipped off his tee-shirt and denims and stood in his shorts. His arms were longer and so were his legs. He turned and viewed himself from the side, sucking in his stomach. His chest was not bad. Not bad. He flexed his arm muscles, standing like the men in the muscle-building ads in his comic books. He pulled his stomach in even farther and the shorts slid down his legs to the floor.

There was a guffaw behind him. Jeremy, of course.

Adam still wished his brother would not sneak up so unexpectedly. In the glass he took quick stock of Jeremy. Yes, he had grown too. It gave Adam a vague sense of relief to see this, as though he had half expected that one or the other of them might be left behind in time.

"Did your package come?"

"Not yet," Adam said. Margaret had written that he might expect a graduation present.

"Think it'll be a watch?"

"I don't know." He felt uneasy talking to Jeremy about his gifts. The same thing had happened last year on his birthday. After all, it had been Jeremy's birthday too. And where were Jeremy's presents?

"It'll be a watch," Jeremy persisted.

"So what?"

"You're just saying that because you feel guilty."

"Guilty? You crazy? Guilty about what?"

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"About me. Not getting anything."

"You're crazy."

"You'll see when it comes."

It came the next day. It was a gorgeous watch with twelve slender rubies marking the hours. Vince whistled when he saw it and said he hoped Adam wouldn't think his own present was just junk next to such a watch. Vicki reminded him sharply that he had saved for Adam's gift out of his lunch money, and that ought to count for something.

Vince gave him a gold pen and pencil set with his name engraved on each piece. Vicki presented him with a hunting knife with a leather handle that would have cost him a whole month's allowance.

The night before graduation, Adam sat a long time on the edge of his bed, with his gifts spread out on the cover. He willed Jeremy to come, but it still didn't work that way. He had to decide by himself. Slowly he opened the watch box, looked inside, and snapped the box closed. He wrapped his knife in tissue and put the pen and pencil back in their case. All three of his gifts were placed under a stack of shirts in his drawer, where he could easily find them to display now and then, for Vince's and Vicki's eyes.

Except for those times his gifts were to lie unused in the dresser drawer for more than seven years.

The four years of high school were like a blob on the face of time, a mass without defined borders. He might have been a soldier in a foxhole, grateful each time a missile flew over his head, but knowing the next one might hit home.

Jeremy said to him once, in the new, slightly deeper voice that went with the new height, the new breadth of shoulders: "The only way you'd ever feel safe would be if the whole family were in one place and a bomb fell. And nobody came out alive but you."

"That's a stupid thing to say!"

"A lot of stupid things are true. Plenty of things you do all the time are stupid."

"Like what?"

"Like getting all slicked up for Edmond every weekend, now that the war is over."

"I do it for Mother, not him."

"If it wasn't for him you could go in your old clothes."

"No." This time Adam spoke soberly. "It's her too. I used to think it was only him. But it isn't. Mother likes things sort of—you know."

"For show."

"I guess that's it. But she's a good sport, anyway."

He saw Margaret more clearly now. The Margaret who had shrieked out her frustrations at them, then kissed their bumps and bruises. The Margaret who had wanted "nice" furniture, and had married Edmond and had become Meg. The Margaret who laughed through eyes smudged with tragedy.

"I'm Adam's yardstick," she would tease. "When he was five he came up to here. At seven he came up to here, and at ten he just reached my chin. Now look, he's bigger than I am. Look, Ed."

"He's tall, that's something."

"He'll be a real lady-killer before long!"

Edmond eyed him curiously.

"Got a girl yet, Adam?"

"No."

Edmond, out of uniform, did not inspire quite the same reaction and Adam had recently begun to omit the "sir."

"Don't kids play kissing games and stuff at your age?"

"I guess some of them do."

"Don't you?"

"No."

"Just don't care for girls?" Edmond persisted.

Adam shook his head and went to stare out of the window. He was not so much embarrassed by Edmond's queries as he was irritated. In his particular world, there were enough obstacles without adding something as foolish as girls. Oh, he knew about them. He had heard the locker-room talk for a couple of years now. It no longer shocked him. Although only

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recently Jeremy had shocked him a little. Jeremy had mentioned the girls from Durango. He hadn't thought Jeremy would know about them. The street lined with those queer little theaters, and the posters full of girls with scarlet lips and cheeks and bosoms spilling out of their dresses. Jeremy claimed that he knew some of these girls. He had even mentioned various acts in which they had accompanied him, his descriptions so blunt that Adam had finally stopped up his ears.

Of course Edmond didn't mean those girls. He meant the creatures in school, girls who might just as well have been boys with skirts on for all Adam cared.

It wasn't until he neared another graduation, toward the end of his senior year at high school, that Adam actually had his first date. Purely by accident, he invited a girl to the senior prom.

She was a girl he regarded as quiet and quite devoid of any special charms to set her apart from the rest of his classroom companions. A week before the prom she wandered over to him in the auditorium.

"Hi, Adam."

"Hi." He was not so much aloof as he was careless of any desire for their friendship.

"Going to the prom?"

"I don't know."

Her eyes widened.

"Didn't you get your ticket?"

"Sure. Everybody got one, didn't they? They came in the back of the classbook." He looked at her in surprise. "Didn't you get one?"

"Oh, yes, but I don't know if I'm going, either."

"Oh."

"I guess we really shouldn't miss it."

"I don't know how to dance, anyway," Adam said shortly.

"Why don't you learn?"

"In one week?"

"I bet you could. I bet your mother could teach you."

He shrugged and said: "I've been too busy for that stuff. I

just got my driver's license. If I did go to the prom, my father might lend me his car."

"My!" she cried. "Honestly?"

As he glanced at her a sudden suspicion struck him, bringing a surge of color to his face. Did she want to go to the prom with him? Was that why she had started the conversation?

"Oh, I couldn't learn in one week," he said hastily.

"You could too! Lots of people do!"

He glanced at her again. The roof of his mouth was suddenly dry. He saw that she was rather pretty in an unobtrusive sort of way, but what had ever made him think her quiet?

"If I did learn," he blurted, "I guess you could go with me."

"To the prom?"

As he nodded, wordless now, she cried: "Oh, Adam, you darling! Asking me to the prom! Wait till I tell the girls!"

She made a sudden move, as if she were already on her way to spread the word. In panic he grabbed at her arm.

"Hey, wait!"

"The bell. I have to get to my seat." She looked at him with quick merriment. "You didn't even hear it, did you?"

"Sure I did. I just thought—"

"You did not! Oh, honestly—and everybody thinks you're a woman-hater!"

She moved rapidly away from him now. He sat down and stared after her. Woman-hater. Him? Was that what they said? Was that why he passed those groups of girls in the hall giggling as he went by?

By the time he got home that afternoon he was wretched. He had decided he would write her a note. He couldn't learn to dance, couldn't get the car. Anything.

"Vicki?"

"In the kitchen."

He stood in the kitchen doorway. He was even taller than Vicki by now.

"What's up, doc?"

"I—can you teach me to dance?"

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She stared at him. Then she bent over her ironing-board, her face hidden.

"I think so."

"What's funny?"

She looked up with innocent eyes.

"Oh. I thought you were laughing at something."

"Laughing? Nope. I'm just relieved, consoled, encouraged, and delighted, as Roget might say."

"About what?"

"A girl. We thought you'd never notice there were any. And here you are starting college in autumn."

He didn't understand. Why had everybody worried about it but him? Sure, he knew most kids dated, but he wasn't the only one who didn't. What would they have said if he'd behaved the other way, going out with those women from Durango, doing the things Jeremy whispered about?

"A girl," he said scornfully. "What's so great about a girl?"

Part Three

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F

XXI

OR THE third consecutive day his steps slowed as he approached the gate, and his eyes lifted. Atop the rounded metal archway a carved medallion gleamed. Sather Gate. He rolled the words on his tongue and felt a stir of acknowledgment. Other figures passed beneath the archway in twos and threes, laughing and chatting. But Adam felt no envy. He was satisfied to keep this moment of the day to himself.

Today he hesitated just inside the gate. He had a blueprint of the Berkeley campus in his pocket, but he was embarrassed about taking it out and marking himself so unmistakably a freshman. He glanced around, but no one seemed to be looking. He pulled out the folded blueprint.

"Hey, fellal!"

He looked up quickly.

"Where's 201 Administration Building?"

"I don't know. I—I have a blueprint with me, if you'd care to look at it."

Adam offered the folded sheet, but it was rejected with the wave of a hand.

"Takes too long. Say there! Where's 201 Administration Building?" Another figure had already been tagged and was replying.

"You want the dean's office?"

"That's right. Putting my name on the rush list."

"Glad to see you're not wasting any time. Theta Chi's my fraternity. The greatest."

"I'm going out for Alpha Chi Sigma."

"Oh? Chemistry major?"

"That's right."

"Well, that's a fine fraternity, too. Of course, nobody does anything that compares with Theta Chi affairs. We're the greatest on the campus."

"You the advertising manager?" The younger student laughed. He had bright red hair that glistened in the sunlight. "I guess everybody thinks his own frat is the best."

"We don't say 'frat' out here. We say 'fraternity.' Now for the Ad Building. You go back through the gate. It faces right on Telegraph Avenue."

"Thanks. And thanks for the tip. 'Fraternity.'"

"That's right. Good luck."

"So long."

The redhead bent to tie his shoelace and Adam watched him furtively. He was awed by the ease with which another freshman like himself had handled a conversation with an upper classman. At Radbury such a thing would have been unheard of. He studied the other student. He was solidly built, with a pixy-like profile. His nose tilted up and his bright red brows beetled outward. He got to his feet, giving Adam a grin.

"You new too?"

"Yes."

"I thought I recognized the lost look. Been trying not to let it show myself. What are you looking for?"

"The Extension Building."

"Oh, I know where that one is. You can walk me down Telegraph and turn on Bancroft. I was there this morning."

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Somebody forgot to tell me I had a half-unit deficiency in trigonometry."

"Why, that's what happened to me."

"Trig, too? Say, you're not going into chemistry?"

"Engineering."

"Oh. Pick your branch yet?"

"Not yet." Adam followed him out through the gate. "Math was my best subject, so I just figured on taking lower division engineering and picking my field later."

"Good idea."

"Part of my family wants metallurgy and part wants industrial engineering." Adam stopped, feeling a sudden awkwardness, aware that he might have talked too much to a stranger. Besides, the thought of industrial engineering, Edmond's idea, left a bad taste in his mouth.

"My decision was made before I was born," the redhead said. "My family owns a dye plant and they always need chemists. I turn off here, I think. You go down to Bancroft and turn right. By the way, my name's Ben Hicks." He held out his hand. "From Buffalo, New York. They've already named me Buff around here."

"I'm Adam Henlein."

"Nice meeting you. Maybe I'll see you around."

Adam nodded. "So long."

"So long," Buff Hicks said.

Adam continued down the street, alone again. Four or five girls pressed past him. One was reading aloud from the school Bulletin.

"I told you," she shrieked. "It says the school does not take responsibility for fibroids of the uterus!"

"Where? Where does it say that?"

"Right here! Is that a scream?"

"Where? Oh—it's among a million other things, joint diseases, TB, and all the rest!"

"I still think it's a scream."

Adam found himself trapped on the walk as they stopped to look at the Bulletin.



"Excuse me."

He made his way through the group, flushing furiously, and heard a burst of laughter behind him.

"Oh, I bet he heard me!"

"Serves you right. You and your evil mind!"

Adam hurried around the corner, still red, to the Extension Building. He wondered how the redheaded student, Buff Hicks, would have handled those girls. Not that it mattered. He himself had learned about women in one bitter night and he wanted none of them.

He registered for his make-up class in trigonometry and hurried back for his first lecture. He saw the Campanile rising to its splendid height above the square lines of Wheeler Hall, and his pulse quickened. There was something about the place, about the very air. He was—free! Here he was free. Yesterday, with no one to question his path, he had wandered past the Campanile and found a spot from which he could look down upon the panorama of San Francisco Bay, with the Golden Gate looped across it like a necklace. A light mist over the city had given it an even more beautiful and more mysterious quality. Almost drunk with the new sensations, Adam had walked along, tasting the names on his lips, saying them softly aloud when he knew no one was near. Sather Gate was his favorite. Sather Gate. Stephens Union. The Campanile. Sather Tower! Last year when he had pored over the university catalogue, the names had been mere printed words, with no meaning for him. But now they meant—everything.

How strange to think he had nearly missed all this, had nearly given in when Edmond had pressed for college in Los Angeles—so Adam could live at home and be properly supervised, no doubt! Adam had vacillated for months, fearing his choice was being made more and more surely with each visit to the new house in Laurel Canyon. The house with the white begonia lawn had been sold, and this new one, like the old, was built to Edmond's giant proportions. Again, Adam had found his mother's smallness somehow pitiable in Edmond's house. Incredible to think he might be there right now if

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Vicki had not stepped in with one of her calm pronouncements: Adam was to go to Berkeley!

That first year, each family was to pay half Adam's expenses. Vince was back in insurance, and things were picking up for the Henleins. Adam figured approximate costs at a thousand a year, which seemed a stupendous sum. He assured both sets of parents that part-time work might supplement his income, but Vicki had spoken again. His first year was to be devoted to building a good foundation for his studies. After that, it would be up to him.

And now—here he was!

He turned in at Wheeler Hall, found his room, and took a seat among the earlier students a little self-consciously. He was still unused to such classroom freedom after the restrictive years of high school.

"Hi."

A girl who had sat next to him yesterday waved a hand.

"Hello." Adam did not look directly at her, but he could not miss the white sweater, in which her breasts protruded so boldly that the effect was reversed to a kind of colossal innocence. Yesterday she had worn a red sweater. He realized with embarrassment that while he remembered the color of her sweater he did not recall the color of her hair. He opened his history book and bent over it.

Sometimes he wished girls had never been thought up. True, his participation had been scant, but he knew plenty about them. He knew that all girls were great actresses and that you had to be clever to get around them. You had to flatter them or buy them things. Judging from his one experience, he was neither clever enough nor rich enough to indulge in women. That girl at the senior prom—he still burned inside when he thought of her. She had smelled sweet as spice that night and had danced with him all evening, holding her red mouth an inch or two from his. She'd even been a good sport about his stumbling. On the drive home, her hand had trailed along the car seat, barely touching his leg. He had fought to control the dizzy urges springing up in him. Then, saying good-

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night, she had offered the red mouth, and everything had welled up in him at once. He had reached for her with his lips, his hands, his thighs, his whole intent body. And she had changed from angel to witch before his stunned eyes. The kiss had become a stinging slap that he knew he would never forget—or forgive.

Now he cast a swift, angry glance at the girl in the white sweater. Her mouth fell open and surprise crossed her face. She pointed a finger at herself, delicately touching the part of her sweater that stretched taut across her breasts, and mouthed the word: "Me?"

Yes, she, Adam thought, and all the rest of them, too!

Now he really busied himself with his book. He would have liked having a friend. Not a girl, of course. Somebody to talk to, the way he had been able to talk to Jeremy.

Jeremy . . . what about him now?

He didn't know. His mind became a queer blank when he tried to remember what he had said to Jeremy the day he had left Los Pepinos. Something about settling down and then sending for him. He had believed it then, would not have been able to conceive of any other life.

But now, in the new, sweet sense of freedom he had found—was there a place for Jeremy?

A troubled frown touched his brow and stayed there. The answer would come. Perhaps Jeremy himself would come. But it was a thought heavy with reluctance, and in turn brimming with guilt.

He found his thoughts moving on, flitting back to the red-headed boy he had met a little while ago—Ben Hicks. Buff, they called him, because he came from Buffalo. He would probably make a fine friend, but he would expect a lot in return. Adam's mind drifted back across the years, to Radbury Hall, to Peter Telby. Of course, Peter had never really been his friend. It seemed that he had no knack for making friends.

Still, there must be some way, he thought, to get to know a fellow like Buff Hicks a little better.

XXII

WHEN HE walked into his trigonometry class the next day, Buff Hicks was there.

Adam flushed with surprise and pleasure and quickly averted his face as he took a seat. Buff was talking to a trio of students at the back of the room.

"Hey—hi there!"

Adam realized the greeting was for him and turned to signal a reply. Then his natural reticence took over and he turned back to his briefcase, searching for a pencil. He found two with broken points and walked back toward the sharpener on the window ledge.

"Glad to see you," Buff said, as he passed by.

"It's a coincidence, isn't it?" Adam tried to sound polite, not too eager.

"Not really. The whole class seems to be make-up in trig, not on the regular schedule. Say, you haven't met anybody, have you? This is Stuart Singer, Milt Egros, and this beautiful doll is Allegra. Allegra Smith. I remember your name is Adam, but I've forgotten the rest of it."

Adam started to reply, but the girl named Allegra was saying: "Is your name really Adam? What a wonderful name!" She smiled. "I mean—all those Jims and Bills and Teds. And the next generation will be even worse, all Stevens and Michaels. Named for the current whodunit sleuths, no doubt. But Adam—now there's a perfectly heavenly name!"

"Allegra," Buff remarked, "is given to superlatives. For reasons I haven't figured out yet, she's convinced life is supposed to be lived in them. In superlatives."

"That's right! I want all there is of everything."

Adam watched her as she turned impudently to Buff. She was very pretty—no, far more than pretty. She was—what was

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the word for the almost saintly profile? It struggled in his mind. "Perfect." Yes. A strange word to use about a girl, but the right word. She was perfect.

"That sometimes goes both ways," Buff was saying. "Hurts as well as helps."

"I'll take my chances." The pure young curve of her mouth twisted a little. But she was still perfect, with skin like gold, and hair sweeping across her brow in a flawless black bang, then falling to her shoulders. Now she turned back to Adam and he saw that her eyes were black too, like black liquid, like ink.

"I'd just die if I were a—a Mary or a Jane! Thank heaven I got one thing I wanted. I adore Allegra!"

"Maybe we just better call you Narcissus," the boy named Ted broke in.

"No doubt you yourself have been perfected by psychoanalysis, Ted!"

"He was," Stuart Singer said. "He had an inferiority complex, but after six months the doctor said he had no complex after all, he was just plain inferior."

There was a burst of laughter, and Adam joined in though he had hardly heard what was said. Now he realized he had been staring at Allegra and he excused himself hastily and took care of his pencils. Then he headed straight for his seat. The merriment went on for another moment behind him, and he sat down feeling a sudden lurching sickness. Why was he—different? Why was he not one of those laughing, teasing boys at the back of the room? It was true, he knew it in his heart. He was different. Terribly, frighteningly different.

For the first time since his arrival at Berkeley, he thought of Jeremy with the old longing, but he quickly pushed it aside. No. He knew that Jeremy was not the answer. Not now. Not here, in college. He had known it since yesterday, perhaps from the very moment of his arrival. Something else lay in store. For the first time he prayed. Let it be that. *Let me be one of them.*

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To his astonishment, Buff and Allegra invited him for coffee later that day. And the next day it happened again, and the next.

He could think of nothing else. At first he put it down to all sorts of phenomena. For example, in the roll call, Hicks directly followed Henlein, and it reminded him of Radbury, with the eternal fusion of Telby and Wenn. Maybe it augured some special relationship.

He kept telling himself it couldn't last. How long would Allegra, who was at all other times besieged by multiple male attentions, be satisfied with just the two of them? And Buff was sure to attract friends who would be far more interesting than Adam. Besides, Buff would soon be a fraternity man, and to Adam this raised a somewhat exaggerated barrier. He knew vaguely that fraternities were social organizations, but in his mind they bore a country-club stamp and were limited to the rich and powerful, or at least to the unusually proficient. His convictions stemmed partly from remarks made by Edmond about his own fraternity days. Vince had attended a city college and had never belonged to a fraternity. Vince and Edmond were worlds apart, weren't they? As he and Buff would be.

But Allegra seemed satisfied, when with them, to forgo the usual circle of men. Adam did not ponder this, merely followed her, laughing when she laughed, trying not to appear shocked at her obvious determination to shock him, grateful even for her merciless teasing.

"You silent, stormy men! You impress girls with your unspoken thoughts, and later they're likely to discover you're simply an idiot. Is that what's in store for me, Adam?"

"Probably."

"You just might find," Buff put in, "that Adam is just as clever—say, as I am. When I look at Adam, I can see myself a few years ago. I was just as much of an introvert."

"You?" Allegra hooted. "You an introvert?"

"I tell you, there, but for the grace of Dr. Kiraly, go I!"

"Who's Dr. Kiraly."

"No gags, please. My psychiatrist."

Allegra's dark eyes regarded him with sudden soberness.

"Did you really go, Buff?"

"Thank God I did. For two years."

"I've—thought about it. Of course my problems are special. Different."

"So are everybody's."

"Yes." All the laughter was out of her now. "But everyone thinks his own problems the most frightful in the universe."

The three of them sat in their usual spot in Stephens Union. Adam glanced from one to the other uncertainly. Did they really mean what they were saying? They couldn't be serious, not these two, with their jokes and laughter. A psychiatrist! For Buff? Buff, remarking he had once been like himself, Adam?

"You're fooling, of course," he heard himself saying.

Buff met his glance and smiled.

"No, Adam. One of the things I find interesting about you is that it's like looking into an old, old mirror, whose reflection I know very well. I would venture to say I had a different set of troubles. But damn similar reactions. I was shy. I was sure I was different. Aren't you?"

"Different? How do you mean, different?"

Without realizing it, Adam had allowed his voice to grow a little loud and he hurriedly lowered it.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I guess I would have said that, too," said Buff.

The words would have been maddening spoken by anyone else. Adam knew this and wondered why, coming from Buff, they had been acceptable. Then he knew. It was because he believed Buff. Suddenly, quite incredibly, he believed that Buff had known the torment and the longing. He looked at his friend with a surge of warmth that he felt must be radiating outward, palpably. Buff smiled back. Adam knew that from that moment on, Buff would be his special friend, and nothing would ever come between them.

Even his interest in Allegra flagged in those next weeks, in the glow of Buff's friendship. He listened intently to every

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word Buff spoke, groping for a clue and turning every phrase over in his mind to see if it bore the secret message. For surely Buff would tell him some day, somehow, what was the answer to it all. Buff would want him to have it, to share it.

He even opened up a little now. He spoke to Buff of Los Pepinos. He told him that when he had been a youngster he had seen all sorts of images in the clouds and in the backs of leaves. He never mentioned that these special attributes had been Jeremy's, not his. He hardly remembered that they had belonged to Jeremy. He told Buff about Vicki, about her searching, prying mind, like the snout of an anteater. He puzzled with Buff over his liking Vicki despite this, and told him that she had been wonderfully good to him and to Vince.

"You've got a pretty good start for a philosophy of friendship there," Buff remarked. "You may as well like people for their good qualities first. That way you might never even get to the bad ones."

Was that one of the clues? Adam walked home that night with his mind whirling. Like people first. Had he failed to practice this? His thoughts tumbled back over the years. Aunt Rose—he knew now what a good friend she might have been, had he permitted it. And Greensie—dear old Greensie, the librarian at Radbury. Why had he regarded them with such suspicion, when underneath he had known all along that they were all right? And the others . . . so many others. Like Buff himself. Like Allegra.

The first chance he ever had to mention Allegra to Buff was one afternoon when she had failed to appear in class. She had a cold, one of the other girls from Fernwald Residence informed them. But even in her absence Adam found that he had difficulty in speaking of her. Finally he managed, as he and Buff entered the coffee shop: "It's funny without Allegra, isn't it?"

Buff showed no similar timidity.

"She probably has that cold in her psyche. What a gall! A real lady manic-depressive. Up to the top one minute and down in the dumps the next. And even when she's feeling mean, she

can look like a saint. Ever notice?" He waited for Adam to nod. "But it's hard to help someone who makes her own problems. Even when she gives you the saintly-eyes look."

Adam glanced at Buff almost adoringly. Buff knew so much. And he would have liked to help the whole world!

After a day or two Allegra was back, and the three of them made their way to the coffee bar. A total three now, Adam thought. Not two of them, and one of him. Afterwards they would part at the corner of Bancroft Way. Allegra lived at Fernwald Residence Hall, in the direction of Buff's boarding house. Adam had never visited Buff's quarters. Buff remarked that they were only temporary anyway, as he had pledged his fraternity and was about to move to the pledge dorm on Virginia Street. He joked about his "apartment." "Third floor, one window, six men trying to raid the bathroom at once. And dinner beneath a red silk chandelier that dusts off the potatoes."

Adam had laughed self-consciously, for it closely described his own rooming house, and his was not temporary.

They had asked him where he lived.

"On Piedmont."

"Nice place?"

"It's all right."

Allegra had laughed. She was in one of her gay moods.

"Adam Henlein, underestimator of the year! It's probably a duplex with a white balcony and rugs an inch thick. And hot and cold running maids!"

"You could probably rent me half of your apartment, Adam," Buff said.

Adam shuddered at the thought of Buff seeing his shabby rooming house. He realized that if their friendship continued, it was quite conceivable that he might be forced to find a new dwelling where he could entertain properly. He could cut down on his meals and add a little to his rent, he thought.

But as the weeks passed and they moved into their first semester, such a decision seemed unlikely. Buff made his fraternity and moved to the big stucco house on Virginia Street.

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Here he took his meals and even insisted that Adam have dinner at the house once a week as his guest.

When Adam protested, Buff said: "Now look. I happen to have a father who sends me a lot of change. Most of my life I objected to his money because I figured it was a bribe. I thought he was using it to avoid having to give me—well, other things. But I'm not a kid any more, and I don't resent my father's money. I enjoy it. If it's all he has to give, he's to be pitied, not me."

Adam could find no reply, no further protest. His admiration for Buff Hicks grew so great that it seemed about to burst inside of him.

XXIII

ADAM SPENT the first Christmas with the Wenns in Laurel Canyon. This had been decided upon in advance, as it seemed more logical to spend summers at the beach at Los Pepinos. But when summer did come, Vince was in Seattle organizing a new branch for his firm, and Vicki was with him. Adam joined them there and got a summer job in the five-and-ten.

He did well with his studies that first year. The truth was that time spent without Buff seemed meaningless to him except for studying. Buff was busy now, but this was as it should be. His fraternity ran various social affairs, and when they were not restricted to members, Adam was usually invited. Otherwise he was content to hear of Buff's social adventures.

A strange sense of marking time had fallen upon Adam. He was waiting, still waiting for that precious truth which Buff would one day give him. He did not wish for it impatiently, nor hardly dared think about it at all, for he was by nature superstitious and always expected that the gods were waiting to trip him up if he gave them a chance.

Allegra had gone out of his life as simply as she had entered it. One day she was there, one day she was not. Their trig class over, he had no special reason to be with her, though she, like Buff, was a chemistry major and Adam knew that she still

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shared a few classes with Buff. Once in a while he asked Buff about her, but for the most part he accepted the circumstances and the occasional sight of her figure crossing the campus, with the familiar male entourage always in tow. Each time he was struck anew by her incredible physical perfection, but he never considered the possibility of reaching for it, as so many others might dare. To Adam, she was as remote and lovely as a star.

When Buff did mention her, he still referred to her affectionately as the "beautiful doll."

"I don't know. I guess once you've been psychoanalyzed, you get religion. If only I could take her by the hand and lead her to the doctor. The head doctor."

"I thought you kind of liked her," Adam ventured. "How come you never date her?"

Buff took so long to reply that Adam glanced sharply at him, almost suspiciously. But Buff merely said: "I might say the same about you, fella."

"Me?" It leaped out before he could think. "With the million guys she has hanging around? You don't think she'd go out with me, do you?"

Buff groaned.

"That makes two of you. Two nuts." They were in his room on Virginia Street and he swung about on his desk chair and faced Adam, who was lounging across the bed. "You jerk. You don't think much of yourself, do you?"

"No. I don't."

"Adam, look. You're a damned attractive character, don't you know that? No, I guess you don't. I remember she used to kid you about your appeal for the ladies, and you probably thought she was joking. But she wasn't. You want the truth? For a long time Allegra was dying for you to ask her for a date. Just one date."

"You're crazy." Adam's voice was harsh.

"No. I'm telling you the truth, Adam."

"You mean she—" He stopped. After a moment he shook his head. He felt queer, all choked up, a funny way for a man to feel. "Why didn't she say anything?"

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"You know Allegra. All out to shock you one minute, and the haughty lady the next. I guess on that point she wanted to be asked."

"You never told me."

"Would you have believed me?" Buff smiled.

"No." He glanced at Buff. "Do you think she might still want to?"

Buff got up and started to rearrange his bookcase, his back to Adam.

"I don't know. She's probably got herself involved with those million other guys by now."

"Oh."

Buff turned abruptly back to face him.

"Listen, I'm starved. Let's go eat."

Somehow Adam could not get himself to mention Allegra again. Buff might have shut a door on her name. He did not even see her again until he went to the Fernwald Little Theater, sitting way back in the last row, well out of sight, and watched her play a Juliet that brought the house down. She was still—perfect. A cap of pearls sat like a crown on her shining hair.

Later he heard that a Hollywood scout had been in the audience and had been much impressed. But her fleeting figure continued to be glimpsed along the campus pathways and he heard no more about Hollywood and Allegra.

He was human enough to think of her sometimes, lying alone in his bed, wondering what it would be like if— But the thought usually died almost before it was born. He was still not ready.

Only Buff could make him ready. One day it would happen. Buff would look at him and would know by some magic means that Adam was ready to receive the formula. . . .

Once Buff remarked to him: "You know, it's tough when you're the only child. You have twice as many adjustments to make when you start sharing the world with the rest of the people. Have you found that too?"

Only child. Adam hadn't even blinked.

"Yes. I have."

The second summer he went home with Buff and they spent two months lazying at Crystal Beach in Canada. Adam met a few girls that summer, even learned some of the fancier dance steps at Mr. Hicks's club. When he left, the girls looked after him and sighed.

One of them wrote to him, addressing him as "Dear Mr. Hard-to-Get."

It was not until his third year at Berkeley that he became clothes-conscious. In this too, his desire to imitate Buff was always the deciding factor. It would have been presumptuous to copy Buff's wardrobe in its entirety, so Adam made a few compromises. When Buff bought a new green checked jacket and dark-green slacks, Adam selected a similar outfit, but in brown. He adopted Buff's habitual white wool socks because enough fellows wore them to make the change inconspicuous. He did not quite dare to copy Buff's shoe style, which was always the same, a most unusual style, with leather tassels on the laces.

He was grateful for his new knowledge of dress, for that was the year he met Allegra again—this time face to face—and looked into the eyes that were to bid him to murder.

XXIV

HE WAS standing on the sidelines at one of the big annual dances. It was not being run by Buff's fraternity, but Buff had bought Adam's ticket.

"I really need you this time, Adam. I invited Joanie Greenberg, and now I find I have to step out for an hour or so. Committee meeting of my own. You can play escort."

Now Adam stood there, bending a little to catch what Joan was saying.

"That couple—the girl in orange. See? Doesn't she look like that movie star? What's her name? You know! Oh, if my brother Don were here, he'd know in a minute. He knows

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everything there is to know about TV and movies. Just everything!"

Adam picked out an orange spot.

"She's very attractive."

"Oh, Adam," she laughed. "Such enthusiasm!"

He moved uneasily in his rented tuxedo and wished Buff hadn't invited him to this one. Joan had many friends and would have been well taken care of during Buff's absence. Adam glanced at her. She was an impish sort of girl with curly dark hair and a nose that just missed having freckles. She dated Buff with the clear understanding that her heart belonged to a boy in Japan. He was pitching anyway, Buff admitted. If Buff wanted her, Adam thought, she must have something pretty special.

"Oh, look," Joan said suddenly. "Allegra! Gosh, how queer to see her without the male gallery for once! She looks almost—naked!"

Adam's head shot up. Even now, so much later, it was a reflex. Yes, it was she, weaving her way through the dancers, waving a greeting at them. She was alone. For once she was alone. She wore a white dress that showed the deep-gold color of her shoulders to perfection, and on her head was the tiny pearl cap that had marked her role as Juliet. Adam stood waiting, not moving. As she drew near, he pulled in his breath in a way that made Joan glance at him quickly.

"Joanie! And Adam!"

Allegra held out a hand to each of them.

"Miss Capulet, I presume?" Adam held fast to her hand.

"Why, Adam!" Her eyes showed a trace of surprise. "How nice of you to remember my great and only performance!"

He looked at her closely now. He had learned a surface smile, a hundred ways to hide his awkwardness.

"You've changed, Allegra."

It was something in the ink-black eyes, staring out at him from under a cover. Eyes that had been so frank.

The laughter drained out of her in that dramatic way he so well remembered.

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"Haven't we all changed? I'll even prove it." Her voice was light again. "I'll ask you to dance with me. Okay, Joanie?"

"Oh, Adam's not my date. Just standing by while Buff sees a man about a committee."

"Buff? The old reformer himself?" Allegra's laughter was high and gay. "Then you can spare Adam. I claim him as my own. Will you take over, Adam?"

"Yes," he said, "I'll take over."

They moved out to the dance floor.

"You're pretty good," Allegra said a few minutes later. "I thought you told me you couldn't dance."

"That was a long time ago. I'm surprised you remember."

Her face tilted toward his.

"Don't be flattered, Adam. I just have one of those peculiar memories. There. You see? I haven't really changed. And neither have you. I still throw nasty barbs at you, and you still take it, even come back for more." She smiled wryly. "Buff would probably say you enjoy the punishment. Tell me, Adam, what did you do when you were six months old that you still want to get punished for? Or maybe while you were still in the womb? Did you bite your mother?"

"I bit my father."

"Ouch!" She stopped impulsively in his arms now. "Want to meet my gang? They're over by the stairway planning a private party. Maybe you'll join us."

"Oh, I wondered how long it would be till the six hundred showed up."

"The six hundred?"

"The six hundred admirers."

She laughed, putting her head back.

"Oh, those! You mustn't mind them, Adam. They're my armor. Hadn't you guessed that much about me?"

"Armor?"

"Armor, protection, use any word you like."

"Protection for what?"

"Protection for my ego, silly. Remember I once told Buff I'd probably live my whole life in superlatives. Well, it hasn't

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worked out too well in most ways, Adam. But in this one way—the six hundred admirers—it's been perfect. It makes up for the rest of the failures. In this one way, I'm a success. Men want me. You see?" Before he could reply, she had turned and was leading him across the floor. "Enough of that. Come along now, Adam. The six hundred won't hang around tonight. They seem to sense when I'm not in the mood."

He followed her silently and, as they approached the stairway, wondered if he himself would ever understand the inexplicable changes of mood that could come over her.

The lights were lower here. Figures hovered about, some of them sitting on the steps. Adam scanned the faces nearest to him, but he did not seem to recognize anyone.

"Gang, this is Adam."

"Hi. Welcome."

"Hi."

Someone grasped his free arm and a shrill feminine voice invited him to sit down. It took a skillful wrench to free himself, something he had learned long ago, when he had first discovered that women seemed to enjoy digging their fingers into the male arm.

"Thanks. I'm quite comfortable standing."

"Oh, come on, there's room!"

"Katy'll always make room for a new man," someone snickered. "I'd like to see her grab one away from Allegra."

"It's been done," Allegra countered.

"Even to you, darling?"

Adam stood a little behind Allegra. There was something he could not put his finger on, something—wrong. Were their voices a little odd, or was it just the thick haze of cigarette smoke that confused him?

"We've got a pad," a voice said, close to him.

It was a stocky blond fellow, talking to Allegra. Somehow Adam knew that he was not a student.

"Where?" Her voice was abrupt.

"Not around the corner from Alpha Gamma this time." He gave a brief laugh. "That was funny. The Christ-centered

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fraternity, going into its weekly devotionals, just as we were going into—"

"Forget it, Thad!"

"Oh. New friend here?"

"Maybe."

"Bring him around." Adam felt a peculiar insolence in the gaze that raked over him. "He looks interesting."

Allegra's fingers bit into Adam's arm as Thad walked off.

"Adam? Will you take me home, please?"

"What about the party?"

"I was mistaken."

"That's not what he said. He sounded as though it was all set. Incidentally, what's a pad?"

"A pad is—" She broke off and by the pressure of her hand indicated that Adam should move a little away from the others. He did so. "Adam." Her voice was brusque now. "Please go. For a minute back there on the dance floor, some mean devil prodded me into bringing you over here. It was a mistake. It isn't for you. Please just go away."

"What's a pad?"

"It's a rented apartment."

"For a party?"

"A lift party." Her voice grew still more clipped.

"What's that?"

"Beer and a little capsule called Emphadex."

"Never heard of it."

"Well, go home and get down on your knees and thank God you haven't."

He was silent for a moment. He was neither so naïve nor so stupid that he doubted her meaning. Actually, he had heard of lift pills some time ago, but had never heard them described chemically before.

Yes, she had changed. Now he understood.

"This—gang. Who are they? I've never seen any of them before."

"Only one or two are students. The rest buy tickets and look around for new recruits."

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"Allegra—"

"What now?" she said a little fiercely. "The gallant knight bit? The young moralist who reforms the beautiful whore? For God's sake, quit while you're ahead, Adam!"

"I won't leave you now," he said distinctly.

For another moment her eyes stared up at his face in the shadowed light. Then all expression seemed to die on her features. She spoke in a flat voice.

"All right, Adam. Just never say I didn't warn you. Or tell you the truth about lift pills. You start with one pill, just one. It's not habit forming, they tell you. Only pretty soon you need two for the same kicks. Then three. Then eight. Eight a day, or you dive so low into the blues that you drown."

"I won't leave you now," he repeated.

"Just remember. I can't go your way any more. You'll have to go mine."

"All right."

After a moment he asked curiously: "Where do you get them? Don't you need a prescription?"

"Thad Beatty's a registered pharmacist. These aren't expensive, like some kinds. They're only ten cents apiece."

"I see. Well, I'll just come along. I won't touch any pills."

"Even the rest of it will make you sick," she said. "Remember, I warned you."

The pad was a four- or five-room suite. Adam did not ask how it had been rented, or by whom. He filed silently inside with the others.

"Got the music?" Thad was already in another room.

"Yeah. Beer's in the icebox. I left a couple of bottles warm for Scotty. He still thinks it works faster that way. He's bugs."

"Maybe he just likes warm beer."

Adam hung Allegra's wrap in a closet in the front hall. From the living-room came a blare of jazz music, quickly lowered. As he entered, Adam glanced to one side, into a bedroom. The girl named Katy was sitting on the side of a twin bed, bouncing up and down.

"Oooh! Terrific beds!"

"Just made for you, Katy."

"You're not kidding."

Allegra sat down on the sofa. The smile she turned to Adam was purely mechanical, and he knew it. She had not spoken a word on the way up. They had come in three cars, more than a dozen of them.

Adam hesitated in front of her, staring down at the shining dark hair with its cap of pearls.

"Want to leave?" he asked.

She shook her head.

He sat down next to her, and the back of his hand touched her arm. He sat quietly, remembering how many times he had dreamed of touching her. Not like this, he thought. Not anything like this.

"Drinks!"

There was a shuffle in the hallway as the third carload arrived and streamed past them into the kitchen. An open bottle of beer was thrust into Adam's hand and he saw that Allegra had one also. Without looking at him, she opened her purse and extracted a small silver box. From it she took a two-colored gelatin capsule and dropped it into her beer.

He watched her tilt the bottle against her mouth. She drank all of it, in great gulps that somehow made him think of sobs. He had never in his life felt quite so helpless.

"Drink up, stranger."

Thad, blond and thickset, spoke with that peculiar insolence in his voice.

"Got your pills?"

"No, thanks."

"Oh, now look, stranger . . ."

"Suppose I just hand you the dime," Adam said coldly. "I wouldn't want to cut into your profits."

For a moment Thad's figure seemed to freeze. Then he relaxed and said with a laugh: "A clever one, isn't he, Allegra?"

"Clever enough."

Adam watched him walk back into the kitchen. The girl

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with the shrill voice, Katy, had come out of the bedroom and stood in front of Thad with an almost violent boldness. Thad's hand touched her hip, lightly, but with such insinuation that Adam felt his insides go tight.

"Give it a chance to work," Katy was giggling. "Try me in twenty minutes."

"God," Adam said. He set his beer bottle down on the coffee table.

"I told you." Allegra's voice was lifeless. "I told you it would make you sick. And you haven't seen anything yet. You haven't seen our little games. Three in a bedroom. Padding the triangle, it's called. And the girls who take their clothes off and beg the boys to chase them. You haven't seen any of the things the rotten human mind can think up. A million degrading, sadistic—"

"Shut up."

"I think I'll have another," she said. She reached for Adam's untouched beer bottle, but his fingers shot out and closed around her wrist.

"I'll get your wrap." His voice was thick with anger, trembling with it. For an instant he expected that she would fight him, or laugh at him. He saw her eyes blink slowly once or twice. Then she merely shrugged.

Before Adam could get to his feet there was a wild shriek from another room. A girl's figure tumbled half-clad from a doorway into the living-room. She lay on the floor, laughing in short screaming gasps. Her slip rode up her wriggling thighs as someone tried to pull her upright. Adam averted his eyes. The music gave a sudden blare.

He didn't remember getting out of the apartment. There was an open doorway, a gust of fresh air leaping to greet them as they stepped into the street.

They turned without speaking and headed toward the downtown lights of the city. They came to a curb and in the darkness Allegra stumbled and caught at his arm. Now she held it tightly as they walked.

"How can you bear them?" he asked at last, his voice rough.

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A moment passed before she replied. "Who else? I'm one of them now."

"No. You'll never be one of them. You can sit in the middle of their beer bottles and smutty jokes and still be a lady. It's the way you were born."

There was a sudden bitterness in her reply. "How do you know anything about the way I was born?"

"Maybe you could tell me."

As he spoke, it struck him that he had sounded very much like Buff, had even said what Buff might have said. Amaze-ment shot through him. Had it happened? Somewhere in the midst of these shoddy hours, had the miracle happened? Was he like Buff now, like the others?

But Allegra's voice dispelled the illusion.

"Ever hear of Jonathan Smith?"

It was hard to think.

"You mean the magazine illustrator? The one who does the Smith girl?"

"That's right, the Smith girl, the most famous body in America! Did you know she's married to him? Her name is LeJon and she's one hundred per cent Pawnee Indian. She's forty, and still as beautiful as every one of his drawings!"

"But what on earth—"

"She's my mother. He's my father."

"You mean you're—half-Indian? Good grief. Don't tell me that's the basis for your mysterious problems!"

The bitterness was in no way dispelled by her laughter.

"Hardly in the way you're thinking, darling, no! I'm not ashamed of it, quite the reverse! It's just one more note of the exotic, the Smith-senior legend I can't beat, can't even make a dent in! Who could? Oh, can't you see how perfect they must have been, before they had me? A pair of beautiful, talented, successful people, with the world at their feet! Don't you see, people like them should never have children? When no child could make such a grade? Ever, ever, no matter how hard it might try? Don't you see that?"

He could not speak, but his very silence seemed to empha-

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size the anguish in her plea. Yes—plea! At any other moment her words might have been a jumble to him, a ridiculous jumble. But tonight some unknown eye had opened wide to show him clear as a blueprint both sides of the glass. He saw the absurdity. But he did not miss the terrible, terribly real, grief!

"Let's just say I've faced the fact that I'll never be anyone, Adam. Anyone great." Such passionate importance, for such childlike words. Yet he had no urge to smile away her despair, but only to understand it. Could it be Buff's miracle, come at last?

"Allegra. Look. Hardly anybody is ever great."

She might not have heard him.

"But I was supposed to be! As great as they! Oh, they're very kind. They're very good about it. But I've seen them look at each other over my head! I've felt their—their confusion that such a thing could have happened to them! Such a thing as I!"

Incredible that she should believe this blasphemy. And where did one begin to answer?

"I happen to think you're quite perfect," Adam said. "You're beautiful, talented—"

"Talented!" she cried. "I played Juliet once, then flunked a screen test! Then I started to write. I wrote a book of poems. It was even published. Oh, that time I thought I had it, I'd made it! Then I found out. It was one of those houses where you pay for publication! He paid them to publish it! My father! He paid them!"

He remembered suddenly, wondering if he dared remind her of it, something she herself had once said to Buff: "Each of us thinks his own problem the most frightful in the universe."

But he could only shake his head, standing close to her in the dark street.

"When I think what it's made of you," he said at last, "when I realize where it made you take me tonight—"

"Oh, but it was such an opportunity," she cried, "for you to come running to the rescue! Wasn't it? Okay! You got me out

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of there tonight, but what about tomorrow night? And the one after? And the one after that?"

But no bitterness was strong enough to sting him now. He merely said: "They aren't here yet. And I don't want to talk about them. I have too many other things to ask you."

"Better ask," she said twistedly, "while the Emphadex keeps me talky."

"Your book." He held tight to her arms, felt exhaustion in her. "What was the name of your book of poems?"

"Senza Amore."

"What's that?"

"Without Love."

"Oh, God," he said. He wanted to crush her to him, but he held her off, waited. "Suppose I kissed you. Would it be you, or the Emphadex?"

"Adam, you fool. Oh, you fool!" But he felt her whole body sink against his. "It would be me," she whispered. "Try and see. Poor Adam. Poor darling Adam."

XXV

HE KNEW that nothing would ever equal the joy of awakening in her room, in her bed, close to her warm-scented body. He whispered that first, remembered word.

"It's—perfect."

"You mustn't say that," she protested. "If you believe in a thing too much, it will hurt you."

"Go ahead and hurt me."

"I will, if you put me on any pedestal." She was awake now, eyes wide. "Why must you be that way, Adam? First you made a hero out of Buff, and now—"

"You think Buff would ever hurt me?"

After a moment she said: "No. Not if he could help it."

"And you?"

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"If Everything about me will hurt you. Because you won't understand it."

"Such as?"

"Oh, such as the Emphadex, if you'll excuse me for being repetitious. And such as the six hundred men in my life."

Adam was silent for a moment. Then he countered: "I don't see why you expect me to worry about the men. You told me yourself they were just part of your rebellion. Something like those sloppy bookcases on the wall."

"You won't see me dancing and flirting with the bookcases, but with the men."

His voice was a little short now. "Just so I wake up with you in the morning."

She made no reply. Lying there, he moved his eyes from one corner of the room to another, trying to recapture that first blissful moment of awakening, chased away so fleetingly by a few foolish words. She didn't live at Fernwald now, but had an apartment with a kitchenette in a closet, and a private bath. No room could have reflected its owner more faithfully. One wall was a cool dark gray, with a white vanity and mirror, flanked by a pair of exquisite golden candelabra. All of Allegra's artistry was there, all the flair she so feared missed being genius. The wall adjoining was stacked with sagging bookcases and an old oak desk. Allegra's rebellion. . . .

"Do you like the picture?"

"Very nice. Is that a Thomas Lewis?"

"Yes. Are you hungry?"

He turned to gaze down at her, a sweep of tenderness bringing back the first joy of the morning. She drew him close, so that his lips rested against her throat. He was careful not to press too hard, not to hurt her. She was too easily hurt.

"Are you hungry? Adam?"

"Are you my mother?"

She laughed.

"God only knows. I'll ask my psychiatrist, if I ever get one. But if you mean am I going maternal on you, I probably am.

I AM ADAM

Not that it will last. You can depend on one thing. If I'm nice, it won't last."

"I don't care. I have two mothers already."

"How come?"

"My mother, and my father's second wife."

"Goodness. How little I know about you!"

"I guess I don't know an awful lot about myself." Adam lay musing. "It's funny. I hear people talking about the time they were little kids, two or three years old. But I just can't think back that far. I hardly remember anything till I was in school, and I must have been seven or eight by then."

"I remember back to the day I was born."

"Impossible."

"Oh, maybe I don't remember actual things, but I remember feelings. Always the same feelings. One big apology for being born."

"I'm glad you were born."

"You'll be as sorry as the rest of the male population before it's over." The telephone rang and she pulled on her robe and hurried to answer it. "Speaking of the male population," she said to Adam over her shoulder.

She spoke to her caller as though she were in the center of a stage, with Adam for her audience. She laughed, flung back her head, pouted. She rang off finally and sat there in profile, a remote look on her face.

But if she had expected any reaction from him, Adam told himself stoutly, she would be disappointed. He had not a reason in the world to be jealous of the man she had just dated. She had given the fellow nothing, had merely poured one more drop into the bottomless cup of her anxiety. The cup would not be filled by a million such drops, Adam thought. He was not sure he could have named the qualities it would take to do the job, but he reminded himself stanchly that one of them was patience. He would have enough of that for both of them. Let her play her childish games. They would never move him.

He watched her get to her feet and cross to the bathroom,

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leaving the door ajar. The water ran, then stopped, and she appeared again, eyes dark and intent on his face.

"That was number-two pill."

"I know. I heard you around four o'clock."

"Well, now you know."

"I knew last night," he reminded her.

"Oh, but surely you thought you could change all that. Tell the truth. Didn't you?"

"I still hope to."

"Well, forget it." Her voice was suddenly hard, and instead of coming back to bed, she bent to retrieve her slippers from under a chair. "Get this through your head. I don't want to give up the men. And I don't want to give up the pills. I like them both. I've no intentions of dropping either."

"I told you before," Adam said, "I don't mind about the men as long as I wake up with you in the morning. The pills are something else again. Are you so sure you couldn't learn to do without them even if you found something better?"

"Meaning you?"

There was such scorn in her retort that he felt the blood rush to his face.

"Better lads have tried," she taunted. "Five hundred ninety-nine of them, to be exact. An arbitrary figure, but your own."

Now he leaped from the bed in his shorts and started for the chair where the rest of his clothes lay. Allegra rushed toward him, then stopped short, inches from him, and gave a harsh laugh.

"So the men don't bother you?"

"No," he said icily, "they don't. You can believe it or not, whatever you like. But you're not going to fling them at me every time you feel like it." He snatched at some clothes, but now Allegra's hand shot out and held him back.

"No! Wait! I didn't mean it, I swear! You know it was only to hurt you. I have to hurt other people to even things out."

He had to hold back, even now, to keep her touch from weakening him.

"What things?"

I AM ADAM

"The things I said last night—that you probably think are pretty stupid and meaningless!"

To his amazement, her black eyes suddenly filled with tears. Her whole face changed, contorted as a child's. She bent forward and pressed her forehead against his bare shoulder.

"Allegra!" Clumsily he turned and caught her close. "Don't," he whispered. "Oh God, please don't cry. You can hang pictures of other guys all over the room. You can get up all night long and take the damn pills, and I'll just lie there and listen to the chimes from the Campanile till we fall asleep again. You hear me? Sweetheart, it will take a little time, but we'll change the whole thing. And look—something happened to me last night. Something pretty big. And I don't think your problems are stupid. I know they're real to you. That makes them important, something to lick! You understand?"

He felt her tears roll down his chest.

"I understand," he heard her say in a low, tightly controlled voice. "And it isn't me crying. It's the pills."

"Those goddam pills. Can't you even cry if you want to? Without the goddam pills?"

"I doubt it."

Now she lifted her face and seemed to be searching his.

"Adam, do you think I could? Get rid of the pills?"

"Yes, if you try."

"Don't you think I've tried?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I have. I tried taking half—"

"What if you tried three quarters for a start?"

"Three quarters?"

"That's right."

"All right," she whispered. "We'll try. Adam!"

"Yes?"

"Do you—do you want me to break the date I made this morning? I don't mind breaking it. It isn't even anybody I know very well. I don't even remember what he looks like. So if you want me to break it—"

"You do what you like. It doesn't seem very important some-

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how. If I didn't know right this minute that you belong to me, I'd be an awful fool." He was hardly able to believe that this was she, so slim and helpless in his arms, depending on him. Yet all the new instincts rushed to tell him that this was the real Allegra. The girl with the bitter tongue, the smoke screen of men was just a reflection of her pain and fear. He would never forget that. He would deal gently with her, so gently. . . .

When he left her that day he knew that he was a man now, with a man's blood beating its message through his veins. He had someone to take care of. He had to be a man.

He tried to forget that there had been anger, too, in Allegra's apartment that morning. But it came back like the echo of something out of the past. That long-ago time he could not remember—and could not forget. What had it been? Somewhere the things that had happened today had happened before. He could hear it, the anger, the tears, the pleading. Had it been Margaret? Margaret and Vince? A phrase flashed through his mind: *The light times and the dark times*. That was it. He almost had it. Then it slid out of focus and was lost again.

That night he told Buff about Allegra. It never occurred to him that it might be a kind of betrayal, to unfold Allegra's secrets before Buff. Talking to Buff had become like talking to himself. He reserved for his private thoughts only the most intimate physical details of his relationship with Allegra.

"You really think she'll get off that stuff?" Buff asked. He sounded careful, withholding judgment. "Don't you think she ought to see a doctor?"

"Doctors can't do everything."

"But lovers can." Buff gave him an odd little smile. "Well, maybe that's true, Adam. Just don't let her hurt you too much. She can, you know."

"No, she can't. I'm not a kid any more."

"I see. Now you're a man."

"That's right."

"Well, I hate to change the subject from men to creeps, but

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I can tell you this. You won't make a dent while she's in with Thad Beatty and the rest of the goofs. You might use that as a hacking-away point. And he doesn't let go of them easily, either. Why should he? They're his bread and butter." He put a hand on Adam's shoulder and all the lightness was gone from his voice. "I wish you luck, chum."

Adam knew from the moment of his next meeting with Allegra that it would take more than luck. She waved away a trio of admirers and ran down Wheeler steps to meet Adam, as they had planned. He knew by the merriment in her eyes, the bubbling voice, that she had not stuck very closely to the new schedule on Emphadex. He had dragged a reluctant Buff to the library and had pored over every available document on the subject of drug addiction. He knew that withdrawal from any drug must be accompanied by innumerable and rather terrible symptoms. Allegra showed no such signs.

"Adam!" She flung an arm through his. "I was sure I'd flunk math, but I went through it like a breeze!"

"Good. Is that why you're so happy?"

Even the reproof in her glance was gay.

"Don't scold. I haven't forgotten. When I woke up this morning. I took three quarters and it wasn't bad at all. But I just couldn't wait out that next four hours, I just had to get through that exam. I tell you it was an absolute breeze!"

"How many did it take to make the breeze blow?"

"Oh, stop it! If your idea is to nag—"

Again, that echo out of the past. Someone else's voice. The same words. Had it been Margaret?

"You're right," he said after a moment. "I won't nag. But try hard, will you?"

Her voice was cold.

"I don't feel much like trying if you're going to be like this. You don't own me, Adam."

He felt anger rising in him, but fought to remember all the things he had told himself and Buff. This was not Allegra, this was a little two-colored capsule working. His sense of

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adulthood, so new and bright, filled him with a pride he had never before known.

"Okay," he said. "I don't own you. But you own me. Is that all right?"

Now he knew that if he pushed her too far, her simulated joy would do a sharp about-face. He would not make this mistake again.

He wrote his first love letters in the weeks that followed. Even these he showed to Buff. At first Buff protested, but Adam said: "Go on, read it. I've seen her pass around half a dozen just like it, just for laughs. If she thinks mine are corny enough, she'll give me the same treatment. Tell me the truth."

Buff read the first page silently, then handed the rest of the letter back to Adam.

"She won't pass this one around."

"You sure?"

"Yes."

Adam glanced at him.

"Something the matter, Buff? Joanie giving you a hard time?" Now he could say it, one man to another. Now he understood.

"Yep."

"I figured something was bothering you."

"Yes, I—Joanie's quite a problem."

"Tough," Adam said shaking his head. "I guess she really goes for that soldier in Japan. That reminds me. I got a new draft form to fill out."

"Oh? My district hasn't bothered me lately. I guess they don't get after us college professors till they start running short. But you're doing okay on grades, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, keep the old average up and they'll probably let you finish school."

"Is that what happened to Milt?"

"Milt Egros? Probably. He started floundering in his classes, and the army grabbed him. Just when he got a new girl, too. Better be careful, Adam."

"I will. The army doesn't appeal to me."

But it was not long before Adam realized that his own studies were beginning to give him difficulties. It didn't show yet in his grades, but he knew it must show before long. It had been easy when his time had been divided between Buff and his textbooks, but not any more.

"How're the pills coming along?" Buff would ask.

"I don't know. She tells me she's working at it, but I just don't know. Why don't I just offer Thad a fatter profit if he'll lay off selling 'em to her?"

There was a peculiar lightness to Buff's voice as he remarked: "Better lads than you have probably pondered that question."

Adam looked up with a scowl.

"I know all about the better lads. But I'm not one of them, remember? I'm Adam."

"Take it easy, boy. All I meant is that it's tough and many people have failed at it. Just keep that in mind."

"If you keep saying that, I'm bound to fail."

Buff grinned. "Sometimes you sound just like me."

"Oh, I've changed a lot," Adam said, quickly mollified. "I never even told you half of it. You know something? I was scared of things, like a kid. Scared of the dark, scared of being caught in closed-up rooms. Real crazy. I'm just not the same person any more. I used to be so gloomy."

"You were a character," Buff agreed. "But you're sure making progress."

"I'm not just making it," Adam said stoutly. "I've already made it, where Allegra's concerned. That is, where Allegra's men are concerned. She can come and go as she pleases, but I'd have to be pretty much of a chump not to know she's my girl. Nobody could have a sex life like ours unless it were the real thing. We—it's just wonderful."

"Glad to hear it."

"Sorry. I keep forgetting you're not getting anyplace with Joanie."



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"Oh, for God's sake," Buff snapped, "forget about Joan, will you?"

He got up and moved restlessly to the window, staring out of it.

"Boy, everybody's sure touchy these days," Adam ventured.

"Just remember you were pretty touchy yourself not long ago. And you might be again." Buff stopped short, then turned and said: "Forget it, Adam. You better scram before I say something I'm sorry for. I don't know what's eating me. Joan, I guess."

"That's okay." Adam smiled. "A couple of months ago I would have gone home and hanged myself if I got you sore. But I'm a new man."

"I know. See you tomorrow."

"Swell," Adam said.

But tomorrow was never to come.

XXVI

WHEN HE reached home in early afternoon, there were two letters for him. One envelope was marked by Margaret's quick, spidery hand. She always wrote as though she were afraid she might be caught at it.

The other letter was from Vicki and Vince. They were going to San Diego for a few days on business. Vicki always wrote when they were going away, in case Adam needed anything or decided to phone. It amused him now, for he had not had occasion to telephone Los Pepinos in more than a year. Vince and Vicki frequently visited him at Berkeley, but as things had gone, he had not been back to the house once, in all the three years since he had left for school. The summers he had planned to spend there had never materialized, and other holidays had been promised to Margaret in Los Angeles.

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He glanced through Margaret's letter, turning it to read the postscript. Did he remember Ernestine, the maid they had had before the war? She had stopped by one day and had sent Adam her regards.

No, he did not remember Ernestine.

He folded the letter and picked up one of his books: Le Page and Seeley on *Network Analysis*. It was a fine book and he had found it fascinating until now. Until now.

All he could think of now was Allegra.

Presently he put on his jacket and left his room. Winter's chill lingered on the air outdoors, and he pulled up his collar as he walked the few blocks to Allegra's.

Her apartment was up a flight of cement-block steps, behind a remodeled, street-level façade exactly like a dozen others in the vicinity. A string of baby-buggies stored beneath the steps, marked it as one of the more desirable student dwellings, rented to married GI's and singles with higher-than-average allowances from home. Adam, lying in his own bed at night, had a favorite fantasy about this hallway. He could clearly see himself coming down these steps with armloads of Allegra's books, armloads of her possessions—the battle won, the exodus completed from everything this place stood for.

He opened the front door, a characteristic frown on his brow. But today he stopped short just inside the hallway. The door slid shut on a noiseless, rubber-tipped rod. But instead of mounting he found himself standing there, head cocked, waiting—for what?

There. Directly overhead another door opened, Allegra's door.

How did he know it was hers—when there were a dozen apartments upstairs, with as many doors? It was as absolute and as unanswerable as the instinct that now sent him in two good strides across the entrance hall, into the shadows of the bikes and buggies. Clumsily in his haste he collided with a pair of handle bars, but the peculiarly stolid tread now descending concealed this small tumult.

It was a tread he knew. From a distance of a scant five yards,

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he watched Thad Beatty departing, whistling softly to himself. . . .

A voice inside of Adam, very level, said to him: "Well, go ahead, go up. They have to meet somewhere. She must get the pills from him somewhere."

Except that there had been something about some girls coming over today. He had forgotten till just now. Some little mention of waiting for her phone call, when the girls would be gone. He had forgotten. And of course there would be a perfectly simple explanation for the change, one that would make him despise himself for having stood here this way, still waiting, still—listening!

But—*again!* The sound that came now was not the opening of a door, but the closing. A small, sly, stealthy closing.

Adam's lids came down tightly. He could bear no longer this dark, nonsensical game. He stumbled from the spot and started up the steps. Sweat touched his palms, and his heart began to pound mercilessly. He forced his steps to slow to normal. But they came on, old feelings, almost forgotten, old sensations that had marked a thousand nameless fears of childhood. He leaped up the last few steps. It was the first time in his relationship with Allegra that anything like this had happened. But the instinct did not fail him now. It told him that in her arms, in her warm arms, the fears would go scurrying.

She opened the door. He saw her face and everything sank in him. No, it was not to be—the warm arms, the reassurance. This Allegra he knew, eyes blacker than ink, a little half-smiling sneer driving the beauty from her mouth. His saint! Resignation dulled his voice.

"I thought I'd—drop in, Allegra."

Without change of expression she moved aside to let him enter. As he passed, she made a swift, mocking curtsy. Another of her games. He felt weary, weary of them, but as he sat down on the sofa, his hands rolled into tight, determined fists, and his voice came lightly.

"Why don't you come sit here with me and have a cigarette? Relax. I want to talk to you for a minute."

"Oh?" It was a sharp little burst, and he glanced up to see her jamming her hands into the pockets of her robe, eyes luminous beneath the dead black bangs. She found her cigarettes, then searched in a kind of frenzy for her match-case, which proved empty.

"On the desk," Adam said.

The steps that carried her to the desk reminded him of Margaret's steps, swift, jittery, somehow pitiable. He knew, watching her, that he would always keep his vow, would remember each time she spoke harshly, each time she sneered, each time an angry red color suffused her cheeks, that she was saying: "Help me, help me!"

"No matches here either." The low, defeated voice.

Adam got to his feet, walked to her, turned her to face him.

"I'll go down and get you some. Okay?"

He felt the tension, felt the decision forming in her very muscles and bones. Then it was made and done with and she had yanked away.

"That's right! Be good to me! Be extra-extra-good to me, so I'll never forget what I've done—"

"What you've done?"

Her eyes came up to his wildly.

"You lie! You were there. You were right there, spying! How do I know? I'll tell you, darling. I was listening, too. Every breath you breathed under those stairs, I heard!"

He stood blinking. Finally: "You mean—"

"I mean when Thad left." Her palms flung themselves upward, rubbed violently against her temples. "God, you can pretend even about that." Her voice sank to a tremulous, exhausted whisper. "Pretending there's a secret formula to life, with Buff Hicks at the controls. Pretending there's a cure-all somewhere for that stinking Emphadex. And now—" She broke off, reaching for the desk chair and dropping into it. "Now you can go on pretending when even the little Smith girl's psyche has had it. I guess I was breathing some pretty fresh air till you dropped into my life and shut the door!"

He stood quite speechless, wrapped in the stinging absorp-

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tion of what she had just said—and more, in all that she had not said as yet. This was no game, no spiteful quarrel, not this time.

Her eyes came up, flinching as they met his. She cried: "You made me say it! You—" She stopped, came scrambling to her feet, knuckles whitening where she grasped the back of the chair. "No. I won't. I won't take it back. You'd like me to do that. That would be so easy, wouldn't it? Throw us right back into that little pretend-world, wouldn't it? But I won't do it. This time let's have the facts from both of us. Do you *dare* to say you weren't down there under the stairs?"

He shook his head.

"No. I was there. I never said I wasn't. Why do we keep coming back to it this way? I waited there until Thad left."

"You—waited till Thad left. And then—you came up here."

"Yes."

"You saw another man leave." Her hand seemed to steal up the front of her robe, to rest against her throat. "And then you came up."

"I don't think much of Thad Beatty as a man," Adam said, his voice still perfectly level. "But we'd better get one thing settled for all time, Allegra. If it had been a man, a man I'd never seen before, I would still have ignored him. If it isn't understood by now that you belong to me—"

"Understood?" she cried. "Understood by whom?"

Something started inside of him, a whole series of little storms that had begun earlier, on the stairs, and had stopped. They returned, the darkening sight, the wet palms, the pounding heart. The things that had not happened for so many years now. Years.

He tried to talk over it, tried to drown out the buzzing in his ears.

"Understood by me," he said, "and understood by you."

"You understand what you want," she said wearily, "because you live in your pretend world. Your lying, smothering, pretend world." Her voice came up a little, fought to steady itself. "It's too bad you ever met Buff Hicks. You might have been

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someone. You might have been Adam. I'm a mixed-up character, okay. But I'm me. I'm Allegra."

He put out one hand and braced himself against the wall, as though he were suddenly going to sway forward.

"You're Allegra, yes," he said. "And I want you."

"Even with other men?" There was no mercy now.

"Stop. Stop saying that word. It's stupid. It's—"

"No," she said, "it's true. Even about Thad."

The storms whipped up like a hundred small threats inside of him.

"Stop it, I said!"

"It's true. I've got to say it. You've got to hear it. That's the funny part—I never even lied to you, you're the one who lied."

"You'll stop saying it." Why didn't that drowning sound go out of his ears, let him hear properly, let him think? "You'll stop saying it when you've finished hurting me. You'll see. It'll be like before. Exactly like before. We'll be just like we were."

"Oh, yes," she cried, eyes blazing now. "It'll be even better, won't it? Because I'll seem twice as neurotic to you now, won't I? And one neurotic attracts another—or should I say psychotic?"

Now anger burst in him, all the little storms leaped up at once.

"You rotten little—"

"Go ahead, say it. Because you're sick. Your mind is sick, a hundred times worse than mine! That's one difference between you and your precious Buff! When he saw there was no cure for me, he was man enough to kick me out of his life!"

"Buff—*what!*"

"You heard me!" Thin, shaky, inaudible words.

"But not Buff!" he said, his voice choked. "Oh, please, God, not Buff."

"Get out!" she screamed. "Get out and ask him!"

He remembered running through the streets, stumbling over curbs, blind with anger.

Buff was not at home, but someone let Adam in, to wait in

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Buff's room. He sat in a chair and stared at nothing. He could hear his heart beating with a strange regularity, considering the turmoil in him. After a while he got up and thrust his hands into his pockets, pacing Buff's room. He glanced at the bookcase as he passed. A slim leather-bound book lay alone on the bottom shelf. He reached for it, merely to pick something up, hold something in his twisting hands.

On the cover were words printed in gold:

Senza Amore. By Allegra Smith.

He remembered. *Senza Amore. Without Love.*

A bit of paper marked a poem, dedicated: *To B.H., whose kiss may yet open my eyes.*

Silently, Adam scanned the lines.

*High in heaven, I lie alone, awaiting,
No voice to spike the silence in the skies.
No violet lights to brighten heaven's shadows,
No kiss to light the darkness in my eyes.*

*Your kiss upon my eyes, oh, heavenly heaven!
At last I see the fallen leaves around me,
All bursting with the clues that life has held,
Yet never in life revealed. Oh, lovely lover!
Your kiss will light the shadows in the skies.
Your kiss will light the darkness in my eyes. . . .*

There was a third stanza, but Adam did not read it. He closed the book and looked down at it blankly. Then, with a sudden lurch, he flung it to the bed. Then slowly, fists clenched, he moved toward the door. In the doorway he turned and looked once more at Buff's desk, Buff's books.

Pain and disbelief shot across his features.

"I worshipped you," he whispered. It came again, like the whimper of a child. "I worshipped you!"

He went running down the steps again and out into the night.

XXVII

"I'LL GET off here," he said.

The man with whom he had hitched a ride at the 101 Junction, glanced sharply at him. It was five in the morning, and dawn was just beginning to show. The stretch of road was deserted and unfriendly.

"Right here?"

"That's right."

"But there isn't a house or a town in sight."

"There's a house up behind those pines. You can't see it from the road."

"You sure, now?"

"I'm positive," Adam said stonily. "I live there."

The man drew his car to a stop and Adam got out. The car jounced off and Adam smiled thinly to himself. Obviously, the driver was just as happy to be rid of him. His clipped replies had discouraged conversation, and he supposed his behavior had been a little nerve-racking.

Not that he cared.

He set out on the trail up to Los Pepinos. He still wore his brown checked jacket and dark slacks. He had taken nothing else with him, had not even returned to his room in Berkeley after leaving Buff's. He had simply headed like a whipped animal toward home.

Now the words that had momentarily been jarred from his thoughts came back to begin their senseless whining: *Your kiss upon my eyes. Your kiss upon my eyes, oh, lovely lover.*

Oh, lovely lover—Buff!

Dew lay along the path, making the pine needles slippery. Once or twice he clutched at a shrub to keep his balance, but he made his way steadily upward. Now the roof of the house, with the pointed round turret, became visible. He quickened his steps, and his breath came in jerky little gusts, filling his

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throat and making it ache.

Oh, lovely lover. . . .

His mind was confused. Had Allegra written those words? Yes. Yes, Allegra had written them for Buff. For his best friend. His best friend! The phrase sharpened his mind, and the wretched, trembling anger came back. His sweetheart and his best friend. The cheapest twist out of the lowest comedy burlesque. How cleverly they had deceived him, laughed at him! He could hear them laughing, screaming with laughter, lying together, naked, rolling over each other, laughing till they cried!

He reached the top of the path, turned sharply, and started to vomit.

He leaned back against a tree trunk, waiting for the nausea to subside. Then he stumbled forward and entered the gravel pathway to the house. Somewhere in the morass of his mind, it registered that only one giant cactus now stood in the garden. The other was a chopped stump, glaringly new.

"A lot of things have changed," he said aloud, and lunged up the front steps. The key was still on his chain. He opened the door and knew the moment he entered the house that they were not at home. His mind raced back to Vicki's letter. They were in San Diego.

There were no blackout curtains now, and light from the early sky streamed in at the stair landing. It was like a beacon and he followed it without will. The pain that had been gnawing at him seemed to expand as he approached the upper floor. Quite automatically he turned left, went down the hall, and put his hand on the door to his old room.

The mirror room.

He knew before he opened the door that he was going to commit murder. His hand drew back and he hurried downstairs again. Into the kitchen. He did not need to put the light on. He knew just what he wanted and exactly where it would be.

The rifle hung behind the kitchen door. He had never forgotten the lovely gleam of its barrel, and now he lifted it from

its rack almost tenderly. This was his friend. This was a man's friend, true and dependable. No woman could lure it, no mocking betrayal could issue from its throat.

Long ago Vince had taught him to use the rifle. He checked it, found it fully loaded. Then he turned and went back up the stairs. This time he walked firmly, without the slightest hesitation. Neither fear nor guilt entered his mind, for nothing, not even a cold, premeditated killing, was payment enough for the blow that had been dealt him. It would be merely a token of the vengeance in his heart.

He opened the door and walked into the mirror room. For an instant the old sensation of unreality leaped up at him. But he stood his ground until the walls gleamed true again, and the room regained its perspective. Now he crossed to the wicker chair in the corner, pulling it out to the center of the room, never releasing the rifle from his grasp. He sat down with the barrel shining on his knees and waited.

He knew that Buff would come, and soon.

Buff. The name twisted on his lips, started anew the hollow feeling, almost of frenzy. Buff, Allegra's lover! He knew bitterly why Buff had never mentioned a relationship with Allegra, a real relationship. How it must have amused them to think of poor foolish Adam, never guessing! It had fed their crippled minds. Then when Buff had finished with her, just to torment him a little in return, she had sought out Adam. Adam, poor idiotic Adam, who would be sure to bring back to Buff the tale of Allegra's new conquest—himself!

He remembered the bright new feeling of manhood he had known and felt sick to the pit of his stomach. Oh, what a great giant of a man he had been! He had prayed that he would become like the others. Now he prayed it would never happen, for he did not want to touch the muck in which they walked. Better to be alone for the rest of his life.

He sat waiting, living through it over and over again. Flinging the book away, rushing from Buff's room out into the night. That was the moment when something had snapped completely inside him. The band that had held his emotions

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in tight check had burst, and the torrent had been loosed that had carried him back to this place, this room.

Oh, lovely lover.

"Adam?"

He sat motionless.

"Adam? So you're back, are you?"

"I'm back." Adam's lips barely moved.

Jeremy walked toward him. He wore a green checked jacket and darker green slacks. On his shoes, a pair of leather tassels danced as he moved. A few feet away, he stopped.

"You came back to kill me," Jeremy said, "didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you really believe you can get rid of me that way?" But the calm manner and scoffing voice did not intimidate Adam any longer, and as though sensing the strength of his brother's purpose, Jeremy's eyes grew less bland. "Stop being a fool, Adam."

"For the first time in my life," Adam said evenly, "I'm going to do just that. I'm going to stop being a fool. Are you ready to die, Jeremy?"

"I'll never die!" Jeremy cried. "You got rid of me before, remember? But each time I came back! You thought you'd leave me behind when you went to your precious Berkeley, but I was there! I was there all the time!"

"Yes." Adam's lids dropped briefly and his gaze flickered across the tassels on his brother's shoes. "You were there. You were right there, still running my life. Or should I say ruining it? You were right there, laughing at me every time you kissed Allegra."

"You idiot!" A trace of the old bravado came back. "That wasn't me. That was Buff!"

"You are Buff."

"I'm not!"

"Yes." Adam picked up the rifle and, as he got to his feet, kicked the wicker chair back out of his way. "You are Buff. You've always been Buff and I'm going to kill you. Are you ready?"

"No!" shouted Jeremy. He took a step toward Adam, but Adam's finger tightened on the trigger of the rifle and Jeremy stopped in his tracks. "No, Adam! You can't kill me! You can't kill me, do you hear? You can shoot me a million times and I'll never die!"

Adam picked up the rifle and leveled it.

"Wait!" Jeremy shrieked, and Adam squeezed the trigger. The room rocketed around him. He closed his eyes tightly and squeezed again. Jeremy made no outcry now. Adam opened his eyes and saw that his brother lay in a bleeding heap. The mirrored wall behind the body was smashed into a million splinters, some of them still swinging from the shattered mass.

Adam walked across the room and opened the middle drawer of the dresser, where his undergarments had once been kept. Now the drawer held an assortment of useless belongings. Discarded baseball caps, swimming trunks he had never used because of his fear of the water, a plastic zipper bag in which lay all the woolens knitted by Aunt Rose, who had never quite believed a boy in California could do without scarves and caps and mittens.

Underneath the bag lay three small packages, containing the ruby-dialed watch, the hunting knife, and the gold pen and pencil set he had received at the age of fourteen and never used. Now they were his again.

He went out through the door of the mirror room for the last time, without looking back.

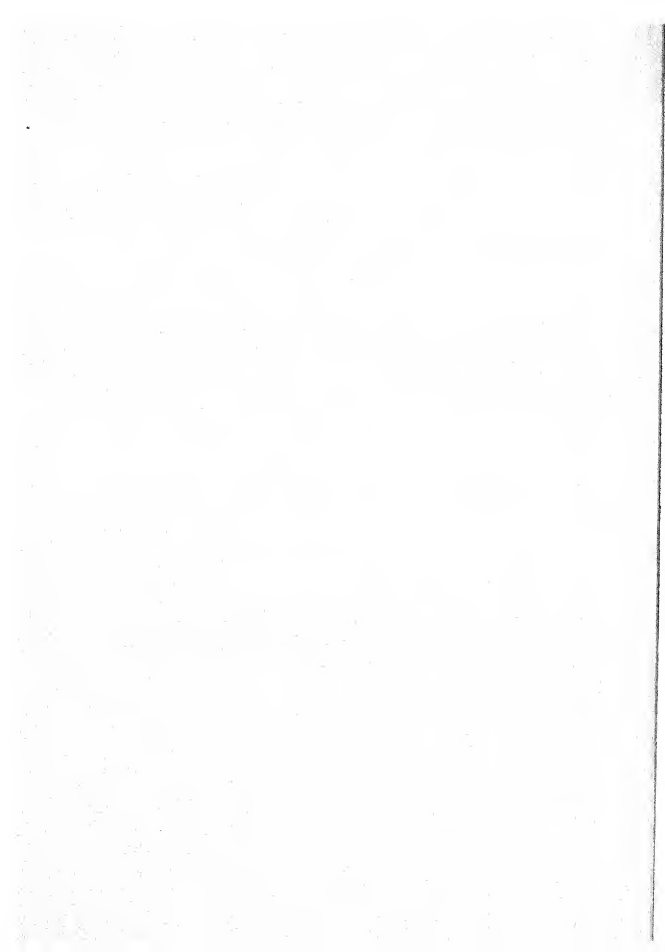
In Vicki's drawer was a leather folder that resembled in every detail an ordinary eyeglass case. She had once showed it to him, explaining that she always kept money there, quite a lot of money, to be used by any of them in case of some emergency. Now he found more than five hundred dollars in the case, which he removed and placed in his wallet.

He took an old suitcase from the hall closet, borrowing certain pieces of clothing from Vince's wardrobe and carrying over his arm his own raincoat, which had been hanging in the closet, newly cleaned, waiting to be delivered to Berkeley on the Henleins' next trip.

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He walked through the house whistling in soft short notes. Then he went out the front door, again without looking back.

In the days that followed, in all the weary, dreary hours of traveling eastward, haunted by fears of capture, one single thought revolved over and over in his mind: *I should have killed my brother long ago.*



Part Four

WINTER INTO SPRING

N XXVIII

Now, in the following March, he lay across his bed in the rooming house in New York City and waited for Pat. She was late coming home from work, more than an hour late. Except for the nights she had mentioned she was going home with one of the other girls for dinner and TV, this had never happened before. And it was unlikely that she was working late. The Milford Baking Company did not pay overtime.

Adam knew all about Milford's now, for he worked for them himself. He ran one of their little electric delivery trucks. His hours were from five in the morning until noon, which left time for afternoon sessions with Dr. Kiraly. Now he saw her only three times a week. It was all he could afford, but she had let him off the everyday schedule without any request from him. One day she had simply remarked that he need no longer come more than three times a week. He had taken it as a sign of progress, of her belief in him. Yet where was the cure? He was still a murderer, still afraid, still hiding.

Pat's three short raps at the door brought him to his feet, surprised as always at the surge of gladness. He needed companionship, but Pat gave him even more. For he knew by now

that she was not one of the curious ones, one of the dangerous ones.

"You're late," he said, "I got worried."

"You mean that?"

"Oh, even I worry once in a while, like other human beings."

She wore a boxy tweed winter coat with a rabbit lining. She started to take it off, then hesitated.

"Want to go out and eat?"

"I guess so. You must be hungry, coming home so late."

"Look, kid, you want to know why I'm late? Why don't you ask?" Her voice was abrupt, and he looked at her closely.

"Okay. Why are you late?"

"I went to the doctor."

"What doctor?"

She gave a brief laugh.

"The baby doctor. I'm pregnant."

He looked at her, opened his mouth, and made no sound. This was Pat, with the deceptive Kewpie-doll face, the jumbled hair. Pat, saying this ridiculous thing to him.

"You're kidding!"

"I guess you never noticed. I haven't been sick for two months."

"Sick?"

"You know. My period."

"You must be kidding!" he burst out.

"I wish I was." She suddenly hugged the coat around her, as if she were cold. "Maybe you better sit down. That's what I did when the doctor told me."

He sank to the edge of the bed.

Finally, his voice hollow, he said: "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I—I'll ask Nick."

Somehow this reply stung him back to his feet.

"Your brother? Why? It isn't his baby!"

She gave Adam a long look from under the straight brown lashes.

"You mean you want it?"

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"I didn't say that! Of course I don't want it!"

"Then what are you beefing about, sonny?"

"I don't know." He felt frightened now, and sat down again, biting at his thumbnail. "God, I just can't believe it. So—so soon."

"One-shot Wenn." But her voice was tired now. "Come on. Let's go eat. We'll figure it out later."

Going down the stairs and heading for the corner, he still found it hard to digest. He glanced at Pat furtively. In profile she was always serious, but now the crisp wintry air seemed to sharpen her blunt little features, change them.

"Pat?"

She walked steadily forward.

"What?"

"What could Nick do?"

"He'll probably want you to marry me. But I guess you wouldn't want to do that."

"It isn't that I wouldn't want to," Adam said. "I just can't."

"Why? You married? Maybe you forgot to tell me. After all, you've only been sleeping with me a few months now."

"You've been sleeping with me just as much as I've been sleeping with you!"

"That's right. That's why I'm not making any fuss. Look, why don't you just forget about it? I'm the one that's pregnant, not you."

The lack of bitterness in her remarks left him even more enraged, more frustrated. If only she would blame him, lash out at him—give him a chance to lash back! Oh, he knew her little game. She wanted to put him on the spot, leave it up to him. But if she thought she could trap him that way, she was mistaken!

"We'd better straighten it out right now," he said, in a low, rapid voice. "I can't afford it. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't. If you need any money, of course I'll help you out."

"I thought you couldn't afford it."

"I mean—for now."

"The word is abortion. Should I spell it for you?" She gave

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him a brief glance. "If you think that's what Nick will want, forget it. I'm his sister. Even a second-story man like Nick figures his sister is different from the rest."

"Then you better figure out a good reason for getting this way."

"I will. Maybe I'll tell him I got raped."

This was too much for Adam. He jerked her around to face him.

"Listen. When you tell him about it, you can tell him it was me, and I'll take care of it without any help from a lock-picker. You understand?"

In the street light he saw that her cheeks were rosy with cold, her lashes glistening. But her mouth curved upward now.

"What's funny?"

"I was just remembering. Once I asked you if you were on the lam because you got some girl in trouble. You said that if you did, you'd never run away. I guess you meant it."

"Don't jump to any conclusions. I don't know what I mean. I have to think about it." Without thinking, he added: "God almighty! I can hardly pay my doctor bills as it is!"

"Doctor bills? Is that where you sneak off to every day?"

He froze.

"How do you know I sneak off every day?"

"I phoned once and Mrs. Simms told me you go out around three thirty every afternoon and get home just before I do."

The last bit of his self-control snapped.

"I knew it!" he cried. "I knew she was one of them!"

"Huh? One of who?"

"You probably know damn well! Why don't you admit it?"

"You know," Pat said, "sometimes you act nuttier than a fruit-cake. All I want to know is, what do you go to the doctor for? Every day like that?"

"I don't go every day!"

"But she said—"

He started rapidly down the street, and Pat hurried to keep up with him.

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"Adam, wait. You don't have to tell me. I just want to know if it's anything that could hurt a baby."

"You mean like syphilis? Not quite."

"I didn't mean that."

"Forget it, will you?" Adam snapped. He felt terribly confused now. "I don't want to talk about it any more. I just want to go and eat and get it over with."

"Okay," Pat said. "Maybe you need a couple of days to think it over. I tell you what. I won't mention it again till Saturday, okay? That gives you four days. I won't even say anything to Nick till then. But you've got to think about it, not just make believe it didn't happen."

"I'll think about it, all right." Adam scowled.

There was a message for him when he came home the next day. He was to telephone Dr. Kiraly.

"Adam? I'm glad you called. I'm afraid I won't be able to keep our appointment this afternoon—or for the rest of the week, most likely. There's illness in my family, and I'm catching a four-o'clock plane for San Francisco."

At the sound of her voice, the truth broke over him like a vast roll of thunder. Until that moment he had not really believed it, about Pat. Now, desperately, he said: "Look, I've just got to see you before you go. I'll do anything. Meet you at the airport, anything you say."

She hesitated, but only for a moment.

"Can you come to my office right now?"

"In fifteen minutes."

Now, sitting in the room that had become more familiar than any room he recalled, he told her about Pat.

"What am I supposed to do?" he asked bitterly.

"What do you want to do?"

"Just this once," he cried, "can't you give me a straight answer?"

"Oh, come, Adam. Surely you've learned by now that you're the only one who can answer your own questions." She played

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with a pencil for a moment, then looked up at him. "It may sound a little out of context, but tell me something. What do you actually know about psychoanalysis—what have you read, for instance?"

"What do you mean? I've done some reading on Freud, and I know there were a bunch of other doctors who kicked the ball around from there. Jung, Adler, a whole bunch of them."

"That's one way of putting it." She smiled. "Actually, it's something like a big family quarrel. We family members know what it's all about, but to an outsider it must look like quite a jumble."

"I don't see what you're getting at," Adam said shortly.

"I think you will. Just let me point out that almost all these different schools have accepted one premise—that man's two real concerns are with sexual drive and personal ambition."

"I guess they know what they're talking about."

"Yes. For a long time the theory wasn't even seriously challenged. But recently a Viennese doctor brought in a third force, which he claims to be as strong as the other two, or even stronger."

"Such as?"

"Well, he points out that few men would lay down their very lives for sexual pleasure, or even ambition. Yet many men have willingly laid down their lives for something else, all the way down through history. What would you say it was?"

"When there's a war, you mean?"

"Partly that."

"Are you kidding? They go because they have to."

"And that's all?"

"Maybe some of them are jerks, I don't know. Maybe they believe in it."

"In what?"

"Whatever they're fighting about."

"Then there is such a thing as willingly laying down one's life for a belief?"

"I guess so. Look, what is this? I came up here to talk about Pat. You never gave me a lecture before; why start now?"

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"I assure you, it will bring us back to Pat."

Adam snorted, but she went on calmly:

"This doctor in Vienna, Dr. Frankl—he calls his third factor the spiritual force."

"Oh, brother. Now we're bringing out the spooks."

"In other words, the idea of any higher meaning to life than mere birth and death is just superstition?"

"I don't even want to talk about it."

Now her eyes were musing.

"You know something, Adam? This happens all the time. A patient will give me every detail of his sex life, his infidelities, even his crimes. But when I mention his soul, he usually looks shocked and embarrassed. Maybe you can explain this to me."

"I don't think I can," he said briefly.

"Oh, come. Surely it isn't possible even in this day and age that the subject of the soul has escaped your notice entirely? What about your parents? Wasn't Margaret an Irish Catholic?"

"Maybe she was once. I remember Edmond said the only good thing Vince ever did for her was to get rid of meatless Friday."

"I see. And what about Vicki?"

Impatience flashed across his face.

"Maybe she believed in something, I don't know. Once she said if God were really up there, at least she wasn't making a nuisance of herself with a lot of petty requests."

"In other words, they considered it pretty unsophisticated to suppose there might be a spiritual side to life. It's unfortunate. Please don't misunderstand me, Adam. I am not selling you the idea of going to church every Sunday. Beliefs may differ widely, may have nothing whatever to do with an actual figurehead called God. A man may have several very personal gods—his conscience, his will toward goodness, mere obedience to his better instincts. Don't any of these things strike a chord in you?"

"Well—I'll go along on the conscience, maybe."

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"Good. That gives us a wedge. You realize that we won't have time in one session for anything but a gross oversimplification, Adam. But let's try anyway. Tell me this: when an infant wants to urinate, what does he do?"

"Now there's a switch." He suspected that she had wanted to shock him to attention, and admitted she had done so. "He just does it, I guess."

"That's right. And when a child of two or three wants another child's toys, how does he get them?"

"Grabs them?"

"Probably. Yet a few years later he wouldn't be likely to do either of these things. Why is that?"

"Maybe he's afraid to."

"Afraid of what?"

Adam shrugged.

"Getting slapped. Or yelled at."

"But many a modern child has never been slapped and is rarely even chastised for these particular misdeeds. Still, he finally stops wetting his clothes, and snatching at toys. What's the explanation?"

"You want me to say he's got a conscience?"

"The beginning of one, Adam. And if he's normal, he'll get quite a kick out of exercising it, as he starts to grow. In school, where he might easily cheat, he's too proud of his honesty to take advantage of it. Later it extends to his job, his military service, and so on. His conscience may tell him to take an unpopular political stand, or to make some sacrifice for someone he cares about. Spiritual things, Adam. You can't touch them or see them. End of lecture."

He had to smile, but he still felt that pressing resistance to all she had said.

"I guess you want me to apply some of this to my problem with Pat," he said doubtfully. "But I don't know. I don't think I have much of a conscience."

"Why do you say that?"

"If I had a conscience, I'd go to the police and tell them I murdered my brother."

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"And if you didn't have a conscience," Dr. Kiraly said wryly, "you wouldn't be thinking about that any more."

"I should have known you'd even come up with an answer to that one." He sat there, regarding her broodingly. She had never talked this much before, and he could not help realizing that the things she had said to him must be very important. Yet he could not grasp the fact that a psychoanalyst would have any traffic with so remote a figure as God, even in passing conversation. Of course, as always, she had brought the whole subject down to a kind of laboratory exactness.

He got to his feet. Doubt still stood clearly in his eyes.

"I can't decide this minute."

"I hardly expected you to, with all the questions that must be crowding in on you right now. Pat's given you a few days anyway, which was very wise of her, and there's no point in phoning here before next Monday. You wouldn't even get any sympathy, I'm afraid. My husband is going with me, and even Mrs. Bussie is taking a holiday till we return. That gives you plenty of thinking time."

"I don't know if I can hold out that long."

"I'm not going to worry about you."

Adam's smile was rare, but when it came, it lighted his whole face. It came now.

"That's because you have no conscience," he said.

XXIX

HE HAD not really believed Pat would keep her promise, would not mention her pregnancy again before Saturday. The only indication of her awareness was accidental. He had gone to her room for some small item and had spied the envelope on her dresser. On the back of it she had made a list.

"Names for girls," Adam read. "Roberta, Judith, Eileen Beth, after cousin Eileen. Eileen Beth Wenn."

Under it was a list of names for boys.

I AM ADAM

Aside from the list, her scrupulousness left him baffled and uneasy about his own part of the bargain.

"Don't think it isn't on my mind," he burst out at last. "I even talked to Dr. Kiraly about it. Not that she was much help."

"She?" Pat gaped at him. "You mean you go to a lady doctor? A character like you that won't even take his pajamas off to make love?"

"That's a nice way to talk," cried Adam, flushing.

"Oh, I'm not very nice. What a funny name she has! Kiraly. With a C or a K?"

"With a K, and what's so funny about it? If I thought you'd be so amused, I wouldn't have brought up the whole subject."

"For Pete's sake. You'd think I just spit on your mother or something."

"You're such a lady," he said bitterly. "Anybody could tell just by listening, by the way you put things."

He had not expected the flash of self-doubt that crowded all other expression from her eyes.

"I guess I wouldn't even know where to start being a lady. Maybe I ought to read Emily Post or something." She hesitated, then said: "Remember I asked you once if you'd ever been in love? And you said yes, there was one girl? I've thought about her sometimes. I guess she was a lady to her toenails."

"About a thousand times as much as you," he replied, still angry. But she looked so stung that he was instantly sorry. "I didn't mean that. I really didn't. If she was such a lady, maybe I'd still be out there."

Pat crossed to the window and stood looking out.

"I was in love once," she said.

"You were?"

"With a boy from California, too. That makes two of you." It had slipped once, the bit of information that he had lived on the Coast. "His name was Jordon Colburn. Isn't that a beautiful name? He was visiting New York. Nick was a superintendent then, in a big apartment house, before he started drinking and got into trouble. Jordon was visiting one

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of the tenants, the Lynches. Their daughter Brigid fixed up the date for me. I don't think he minded that I was the superintendent's sister. He was awfully nice. I was only sixteen, but I stayed in love with him a whole year. And he never even wrote to me."

"The cad." Adam tried to joke, to make her forget his cruelty. "He's probably married by now and has six kids."

"Oh, it doesn't bother me any more. I wasn't his kind, I guess. I wasn't much of a lady then, either. Brigid taught me to say I thought Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C sharp minor was just darling, but I guess he could tell I wouldn't know it from Henny Penny."

There were times, even when she had irritated him to the core, when her bubbling honesty startled him. Now he laughed, and she turned to him, her face so brightened by his pleasure that the last bit of his annoyance vanished. He walked across the room and took her into his arms. She raised shining eyes.

"Gee, it feels great when you take me around."

"I think I'll do it all the time."

"No, don't say that. Anyway, not till Saturday. Then you'll be sure if you mean it or not."

"I'm just sorry I'm so rotten sometimes."

"I guess you have a lot on your mind. I just wish you'd tell me why you go to that doctor all the time."

"I'll tell you when it's all over."

"It couldn't hurt a baby? Whatever it is?"

"I told you. No."

"Because when I went to this baby doctor he asked if either of us had any—diseases. I told him no."

"You were right."

"Then it doesn't figure. What does this doctor do for you, if there's nothing wrong?"

"Forget it, will you?"

"Did you see her today?"

"No. She's in San Francisco. Somebody in her family got sick out there."

I AM ADAM

"But what if you got sick right here? Is somebody else in her office? Somebody who could treat you?"

"Not even the maid. The place is all locked up."

"Then what would you do? Adam, is it anything like—like diabetes? Anything like that? If it is, you better tell me, so I can tell the baby doctor."

"I told you." He fought to keep the impatience out of his voice. "It's nothing contagious and it's nothing hereditary."

"Then why—"

"Oh, Jesus. Are you going to forget it, or aren't you?"

"I'm sorry."

"Then let me alone!" Now he jammed his hands into his pockets and went back to sit on the bed. "Just let me alone. Let me enjoy my reprieve till Saturday."

On Friday night she was late again. It had been a long afternoon, and at five thirty he began to pace his room, wishing desperately that she would hurry and come home. His decision was teetering on the edge of his mind and he had a feeling that the moment he saw her, he would know the answer.

Finally, when he was so unnerved by the silence that he could not even pace with any comfort, Mrs. Simms came up to tell him Pat had phoned earlier to say she might not be home till quite late.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" Adam exploded. But at the sight of his landlady's pale eyes peering curiously past him, into his room, he closed the door fiercely in her face.

After a while he realized the neighborhood restaurants would soon close, and he set out to find his dinner. It was half past nine when he headed back toward his rooming house. Pat might be home when he got there. He felt quite calm now, almost blissful. Quite suddenly he knew that he was going to ask Pat to marry him. It was absurd, he knew. He could barely take care of himself. But he had realized, finally, caught between shock and pride, that he had one of those things Dr. Kiraly had mentioned—a conscience.

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What was it she had said about a man's conscience leading him to make sacrifices for someone he cared about? Well, he cared about Pat. He knew this, despite all their differences. It seemed a very long time ago that he had suffered through his puppy love for Allegra Smith.

If only that dreary, threatening cloud were not still hanging over him—over both of them now. Could he escape it forever? In the *mêlée* of New York's young couples with new babies, could he lose the old identity completely? Or must it continue to endanger their existence, always?

No matter now. He was going to ask her tonight.

He went up the steps two at a time and saw through the banister rods that a light was on in Pat's room.

Her door opened an instant before his knock. Pat stood there in her tweed winter coat. A red scarf covered all but the front of her clipped, upspringing hair. She carried a suitcase in one hand and had one or two garments over her arm.

"Pat!"

He saw all the color go draining out of her, leaving her skin milky, her lips bloodless. She stared at him as though he were a stranger.

"Adam," she said finally, in a low, strained voice.

"What are you doing? What's all this?" He kicked at the suitcase and reached to touch the clothes over her arm. But as his hand came toward her, she shrank back with a queer little cry, the suitcase clattering to the floor.

Now his astonishment turned to disbelief. Such a cry could have been wrenched from her only by fear. Fear of—him?

"Please," he heard her say unsteadily, "please let me go. Nick is waiting for me. We saw you leave, but I guess it took me longer to pack than I thought. He said if I didn't come down in twenty minutes—"

"You mean you're going somewhere with Nick?"

"I'll be back. I swear I'll be back!"

He realized, his bewilderment grown to bursting, that she was telling a lie, that she meant to go away with her brother and never come back.

I AM ADAM

He shook his head.

"Pat! I came back here—to ask you to—to—"

"No!" she cried. "Don't say it. Please don't say it, just let me go! Don't try to stop me, Adam. If you hurt me, you might hurt the baby."

"Hurt you!"

"You wouldn't mean to," she said, her voice low and rapid. "You might not even know what you were doing, Adam. Listen. I know. I know all about the doctor. Why you go there."

"Why I go there?"

"Nick found out. I—I told you a fib, Adam. I said I wouldn't tell Nick till Saturday about the baby. But when I got out of work at lunchtime today, he was waiting for me. I told him, Adam. He just went crazy." She stopped, biting down hard on her lip. "Adam, I didn't mean to say that! I didn't mean to say that word!"

"What word?"

But she was mute now. And suddenly, he knew. Incredibly, he knew.

"That word," he said slowly. He stopped, still unable to believe it. "Are you trying to say you think I'm—crazy?"

"I didn't say it! It's only what Nick read—"

Adam's lips thinned now. Each word came with a dreadful deliberateness.

"What did Nick read? And where?"

"I told him about the doctor," Pat cried. "And that you wouldn't tell me what was the matter. And I was scared it might hurt the baby." Her voice lowered a little. "He—he said he was going to see her. I remembered her name. Kiraly. With a K. He tried to phone her, but there wasn't any answer. Then I remembered she was away and nobody was there. You know Nick." Now it was barely audible. "There isn't a lock in the world he couldn't pick."

Adam said hoarsely: "He wouldn't dare. Not a doctor's office, a doctor's files. He wouldn't dare."

"Yes," she whispered. "He would. He did."

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"And you mean he read—about me?"

"Yes. He knew what kind of a doctor she was when he saw what she wrote."

Adam leaned into her room a little, hands braced tightly on the doorframe.

"A psychiatrist. Are you afraid to say that word, too?" His voice was strangely level. "You're a very stupid little girl, you know that? Everybody who goes to a psychiatrist isn't—crazy."

"Even if she wrote—" Pat broke off, averting her eyes. "Adam, if I don't get down there, Nick will come after me. I don't want him to come up here."

"Even if she wrote what?" Adam did not move out of her way. "What did she write?"

Pat's eyes moved slowly back to his face, and he knew that the first spasm of fear had left her. She was not afraid of him now. Yet he knew that she was not going to change her mind about leaving. She was going to tell him something, something fearfully urgent, and then she was going to leave him.

"Adam, don't you know? Really, don't you know?"

"What did she write?"

"She wrote—she wrote something that even stupid people like Nick and me can understand, Adam. They have articles about it in magazines, and they show it on TV. It means someone who—" She wrung her hands. "Oh, why can't I be a lady, just this once, and say it the way a lady would say it? But I'm just not from Park Avenue, Adam, I can't make it sound soft and sweet. I've got to tell you—straight! Adam, it means somebody who's nuts, somebody who's got rocks in his head!" The shock that must have crossed his face was reflected in the flinching on hers. She whispered: "Oh, Adam, forgive me. When Nick told me, when he said there's no cure, I—I just went to pieces. I guess I haven't gotten over it yet. I fought with him, I fought with him for hours, but I lost. Because it all fits! All the things you've said and done, I—I can't fight them! Listen, I'd chance it for myself, even Nick couldn't stop me. I want you to know that. But with a little kid to think about, a little baby—"

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Adam's fingers were numb on the sharp edge of the door-frame.

"What did she write?"

"She wrote—schizophrenia."

He stood motionless. Pat's fingers laced and twisted together, but the desperate drive in her did not soften. She bent, all at once, and picked up the suitcase, then stood waiting for him to step aside. Adam's arms dropped. As she crossed the hallway and started down the steps, her heels rang like little hammers. She paused.

"I'll write you a letter." Her voice was husky. "My spelling's lousy, but you'll see how I really feel." She hesitated, then shook her head and started down the steps again. Adam heard the door click. Eyes stony, he stood leaning against the wall beside the open doorway to her room. Presently he reached out to pull the door closed, and crossed to number nine. For the first time he did not put his lights on, but sat in the darkness. Fear of the darkness seemed very remote now.

He did not leave his room until Monday morning, when the library would be open on Fifth Avenue.

He badly needed a shave, and wore the clothes he had sat in and slept in for two days. Distaste showed in the eyes of the information girl, but he told her without apology what he wanted, and she directed him to the proper room.

There were many books about it, and until the library closed that night, he sat reading through them. There were passages that seemed to engrave themselves on his mind, words and lines he knew he would never, never forget.

Schizo—split. Phrenia—mind.

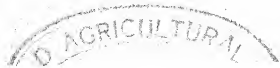
Total retreat into a world of hallucinations. A whole network of explanations to justify two worlds, two lives.

Frequent invention of one or more imaginary companions.

The belief that one was being followed, spied upon.

Schizo—split. Phrenia—mind.

That night he slept at a flea-ridden hotel on the Bowery. He lay on a fifty-cent cot, one of a long line of reclining men even dirtier and more unkempt than himself. The cots were



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lengths of canvas stretched over wooden frames that squealed when someone turned over. He dreamed he lay in a pen full of pigs, squealing, pushing pigs, up to their stomachs in slime. Once or twice he awoke from the dream, but he did not try to push it away. This was insanity. There was no cure.

When he awoke in the morning, he got up from his cot and slid gracelessly to the floor. He had not eaten since Friday night. With one arm he struggled to push himself up, and a cut place on his finger began to bleed.

He sank back to the floor and closed his eyes and waited.

When they tried to rouse him, he could only mutter some incoherent words. Finally they understood. They were to telephone to Dr. Kiraly, on Fifty-fifth Street.

XXX

STEAM FROSTED the mirror and formed small stalactites on the bathroom ceiling. Adam lay back in the tub, his mind adrift, as were his limbs. He had not wanted to succumb to the superficial warmth of a hot bath in a clean tub. He had not wanted anything to make him forget. He must never forget again. But in the end he had ceased to fight and had gone sinking, sinking, into the lulling warmth.

"You in there!"

He did not open his eyes.

"Yes?"

"Fasten a towel around your middle. I'm coming in," announced Mrs. Bussie. "Don't worry about putting the towel in the water. Just wrap it around, you hear?"

"Yes."

"Ready?"

He pulled a towel from the rack and draped it across his thighs.

"Yes."

She opened the door, then closed it quickly behind her.

"Whew! Nice and steamy in here." She carried the clothes

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he had handed out to her half an hour before. They were draped neatly on hangers and had obviously been sponged. "The steam'll do for the rest of these wrinkles. When doctor gets here you'll look human again." She eyed Adam's dank hair, and went, muttering, to the medicine chest. "Must have something here. Let's see, now. This looks like it might be right. Egg shampoo."

Adam watched her silently, the towel secured beneath his buttocks.

"Here," Mrs. Bussie ordered. "You sit up and hold a washcloth to your eyes. Tight, now." She bustled beside the tub, behind it. Water poured over his scalp, and a quick cold splash of shampoo. The lather worked up by her fingers smelled tangy-sweet.

"Look at those ears. You'd get poor potatoes in that soil."

Again he wished he had the will power to resist the temporary warmth, the transient comfort. For it would vanish in a moment, leaving him bitterly alone again. Always alone.

"You sure are a skinny boy," she observed. "Like a scarecrow in a cornfield."

His voice was muffled. "I'd like that fine."

"Go on, with nobody around but birds? Sit up now while I dry your hair." She wiped his ears as she might have done for a small boy. "You'd soon want some folks around. It takes other folks to make us happy."

"Or unhappy."

"Maybe it looks like that now." She rubbed his head briskly. "But later you'll see the way it really is. You'll see the only way the Lord has to open our eyes sometimes is to put us through trial."

"The Lord?"

"That's just what I figured you to say."

"You don't have to start talking like the doctor."

"I bet you said it to her, too." Mrs. Bussie was unperturbed.

"Look at you now. You take a shave, and she'll never know what you looked like when I told them to bring you up here."

"She'll know."

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"Maybe. But at least she won't have to look at you all muddy and bloody."

Sudden weary dejection gripped him.

"I guess you're right," he said. "Thanks anyway. Thanks for all you did."

"I don't mind helping a nice boy when I see one. You better get dressed now. She only works at the clinic half a day. She'll walk in here any minute." The sturdy frame moved toward the door, then paused. "Listen, you think over what I said. Leave the Lord out of it if you like, but I'm telling you the truth. Some day you'll look around and see all the people that never suffered and never felt any joy either, because their eyes were never opened up. It takes a peck of suffering to make us see how short life is, and to make us live it right up to the top of the barrel. Some day you'll remember what I told you and you'll see I was right."

Now she left. He lay beneath the sweaty drops on the ceiling. It took a great gathering of effort to haul himself upright and step out of the tub. Weakness grabbed him about the knees and he held to a towel rack while he dried himself. Her words became a part of the million whirling words, senseless words, in his whirling, senseless mind.

He sat in the chair he had never expected to feel again beneath his haunches. His eyes followed, without expression, the antics of a puff of cloud in the March sky. Of course the cloud might not really be there. It might be a hallucination. He would never again be sure, would he?

"Mrs. Bussie tells me you finally kept some coffee down, Adam."

"Yes."

Dr. Kiraly took her place behind the desk. She was no longer the olive-skinned, prematurely gray-haired woman whom he had come to find warm and attractive. Now she was the figure of doom, of certain disaster. There was only one thing left for that clear voice to give—a stamp of dread finality to the truth.

"A lot has happened, Adam."

"Yes."

"Do you want to tell me about it?"

"I went to the library. I read about schizophrenia."

"And you reached certain conclusions?"

"The conclusions were obvious. I wanted to check the symptoms. They checked, all right."

"And did you check any other possibilities? Besides schizophrenia?"

"No."

"Why is that?"

"Look, we've played hide-and-seek long enough. I may as well tell you. Someone I know—a friend—broke in here while you were away and looked at my file."

"Yes, the entry was quite evident. Your file was here on my desk, opened to page one. Too bad your friend didn't have the courage to stay and read a little further."

"Why?" The bitterness broke through. "Did you change the diagnosis on page two?"

"No. I didn't even question it until page three." She flipped through the pages on her desk, then glanced at Adam. "Page three. Dated two days after your arrival. It took two days to reach Buff, long distance."

All the breath seemed to bounce out of him, but he rallied, forcing a reply.

"You talked to Buff—then?"

"Yes. He wrote me frequently, you know. It didn't take long to realize you were the boy he had mentioned in his letters."

"Then that was it," Adam said slowly. "I wanted to know why you didn't turn me over to the police. You said you'd tell me some day, when I could accept your reason. And that was your reason, wasn't it? You'd talked to Buff."

"Yes. But several other items made me question your story, as well. For example, for a murderer in hiding, you hadn't taken much trouble to disguise your name, had you?"

He watched her, eyes brilliantly dark.

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"That indicated," she said, "that subconsciously you were willing—even eager—to be caught. And faced with the truth by force, since you couldn't face it by yourself."

"You knew." He fought to control his voice. "You knew I wasn't a murderer." Now sweat broke in his palms, and the words shook. "And after you'd talked to Buff you knew I—you knew I never even had a brother!"

He caught the quickly concealed expression that knifed across her face. Pity!

"Adam—"

"No!" he cried. "I don't want your pity, and your lies! Those lousy lies! I read the truth! They could have looked a million miles and never found a better example of a paranoid schizophrenic! And don't lie to me about a cure, either! There isn't any cure!"

She was her crisp, inscrutable self once more.

"You are quite mistaken, Adam. There are many new ways to treat schizophrenia. But understand this. If I had a cure right here on my desk, it would not help in your case."

"No. Because I'm too far gone!"

"No. Because you are not a schizophrenic."

His voice still trembled.

"What am I, then? Make it good. Explain away the people I thought were spying, following me, pointing. Explain away the two worlds I lived in!"

"The people who whispered, who spied? They weren't even imaginary, Adam. I haven't a doubt in the world they were quite real."

"Oh? You too? Have you seen your analyst lately?"

"Jumping off and on strange trains, Adam! Talking aloud in bars, to imaginary companions! Sneaking up and down the stairs of a rooming house, always peering behind you! Don't you see that your very behavior was enough to evoke stares from the curious and whispers from the inquisitive?" She didn't wait for his reply. "And the fears. Deep water, high places. Those symptoms are equally common to cases of severe anxiety as they are to schizophrenia. That is my diagnosis,

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Adam, severe and unrelieved anxiety. You wouldn't admit to the real fear, but the guilt and anxiety were there and had to be pinned to something. So you pinned them to these senseless phobias. No, Adam. Any number of times you have been pushed by one shock or another into a schizophrenic pattern, but that's all it has been—a pattern. You broke it up very efficiently at Berkeley. Until once more you were shocked back into it."

"When I ran back to the mirror room to shoot my hallucination in the head?" He gave a bitter laugh. "You make it sound nice and fancy, all right. But I think I'll take a tip from Pat and tell it straight. The whole thing. I never had a brother. I invented Jeremy because I couldn't take hard knocks like a normal boy. Jeremy was a perfect shock-absorber for all the fears and inhibitions of a kid going insane. Jeremy saw the naked ladies in the clouds I didn't dare to see, Jeremy went to bed with the girls from Durango for me! Jeremy wasn't afraid of the dark, or the water, or the little rooms and high places! And when my girl kicked me out, it was easier to face the phantom Jeremy than the real Buff! Wasn't it?" His voice had risen, but now it sank, in raw bewilderment. "Why? Why did I invent a Jeremy? Explain that one away."

Dr. Kiraly pushed a pencil across the papers on her desk. Finally she said: "I think we can even answer that one, Adam. But first I want a promise from you."

"A promise? It wouldn't mean much, from someone who's—insane."

"Obviously, if I thought you insane, I wouldn't ask for a promise. It's this, Adam. I want you to promise to return for therapy until I dismiss you. Even if the things we uncover today may convince you that you are cured. You are on the way to a cure, but you are not cured."

"Cured!" He shouted it, sputtering with contempt. "I'll never be cured, and you know it! Even Pat knew it! That bird-brain told me more in two minutes than you told me in a year!"

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"Pat made a very brave try, Adam. But—"

"You don't have to sound so patronizing! She wouldn't want your sympathy!"

He saw, almost beside himself now, that Dr. Kiraly dared to smile.

"If you knew her," he cried, "you wouldn't laugh!"

"I am not laughing at Pat. Haven't you noticed by now that I smile when I'm pleased? Even your crusty old analyst is human enough to be proud of a success, Adam."

"Oh, God. Now I'm a success."

"It takes quite a man to rush to the defense of a woman who has just thrown him over. You didn't do so well a year ago, did you?"

He could not speak. He put his face down wearily, in his hands. Hiding from the light. Hiding from the mistaken pride in her eyes.

"Adam, you've asked me to explain why you invented Jeremy. I must state something which will be very painful to you. But after a moment you will realize you knew it all along. And we can go on from there."

He sat motionless.

"You did have a brother. And his name was Jeremy."

"No." It came, muffled, almost before she had finished speaking. "No. You mustn't say that. I made him up. I am insane, I don't mind being insane, but I'm not a murderer. I never had a brother. I never killed him. I never had a brother."

"You've said that to yourself for fifteen years now, haven't you?"

His face lifted, and a blank shut-away look filled his eyes. He got to his feet.

Now Dr. Kiraly's voice hung like clear crystals on the air.

"The door is locked, Adam. You are afraid of the window, and there is no other exit. Last time we touched on the truth, you rushed off and found Jeremy in a bar, to prove me wrong, to prove he was not dead. But there is no escape now, and no need for one. Sit down, please."

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His mind moved like a scale, a little metal scale searching for a balance. Very softly, he said: "How do you know I won't kill you, the way I killed Jeremy?"

"You didn't kill Jeremy."

The scale tilted wildly, and he said in a rapid voice: "That's right. That's right, I didn't. It was Jeremy who pulled the trigger, and it was I who was shot! I remember now. It was on the stairs. That day on the stairs. I have the scar. Here on my hand. Right here, where Jeremy shot me. You see? You see the scar?"

"Will you please sit down, Adam?"

It came like cold water poured over him. He stood for another moment, then sank into his chair.

"You've given me several versions of the story now, haven't you?" she asked. "And whenever you've come near the heart of the matter, you've scrambled off somewhere with still another version. I'm afraid this time I must be the one to tell it—straight." She shook her head a little. "Adam, the truth is so much simpler. Why can't you accept it? You did not shoot Jeremy, that day on the stairs. And Jeremy did not shoot you. You were two tough little seven-year-old boys, Adam, fighting for possession of a deadly weapon. It went off. That's all that happened—it went off! And the bullet went through your hand, Adam, between the forefinger and the thumb. And on into Jeremy's heart."

His eyes were closed, tightly, tightly.

"How do you know that?" he asked in a hollow voice.

"It could not have happened any other way. Seven-year-olds are not murderers. This was corroborated last week in California, when I saw Vicki."

"You saw—Vicki?"

"Yes. It isn't the conventional thing to do, but we had reached a critical point, where such a step on the part of an analyst is not forbidden. You were right, by the way. Vicki has known for some time that you were in New York, and has kept the others from contacting you before you were ready. She is a remarkable woman, your Vicki. But she didn't deny her

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share of the blame. Not even she had had the courage to talk it over with you, to face your anger and your accusations. Yes—accusations. Because secretly each of them knew he was partly responsible for Jeremy's death, and for your loss. If it had been freely aired, who would have shown up as guilty, Adam? A little boy who fought over a gun? Or four adults, whose blundering self-concern placed that gun in his hand? No, not one of them could face it. So they huddled together and told each other that no one must ever mention the killing to you again—for your sake, they said. After a while, being human, they may even have come to believe it was for your sake, Adam. I hope you will forgive them. Had they known what the result would be, I don't believe any one of them, neither Margaret nor Vince, Vicki nor Edmond, would have allowed it to happen. They just—didn't understand. And so, out of a childhood accident, they allowed a monstrous sin to settle over you. Their silence told you, every waking moment, that you had killed your brother."

"I did murder him," Adam whispered. "I did. I've always known it."

"And I tell you, little children of seven do not commit murder!"

"But they—they even sent me away. Like—like a—"

"Like a murderer. Yes. It was easier for them, Adam, with no little boy around to remind them. Then when you came back, they all fought to make it up to you, to salve their consciences with gifts, with attentions, with declarations of their attachment to you. But little boys see through these things, don't they? And they fight to escape what they can't cope with. You dreamed of physical escape, and sought emotional escape through Jeremy's return. No one spoke of Jeremy, did they? Still, there were the whispers sometimes, little glances, little cut-off voices when you entered a room. You've mentioned this to me many times, about the cut-off voices. Each time it happened, you were reminded of Jeremy's death, and your supposed guilt. Yet in your heart you knew you had loved Jeremy and would not have hurt him in any way. How to prove such

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a thing? Bring Jeremy back, rationalize the flaws, and explain away the impossible. This was the only weapon they left you."

His eyes were still closed, but with every cell in his body he listened. Listened.

"You loved your brother very much," Dr. Kiraly said. "So much that the shock of his death, and his loss, never really wore off. It will wear off now, Adam, now that you face it. But you loved him far too much to murder him."

"Wait," he said, his voice low and uneven. "You forget. What about later? In the mirror room? I wanted to kill him then."

"You wanted to kill the hallucination that had ruled you for fifteen years. And you did." Very gently, she said: "You killed Jeremy's ghost, Adam. A cruel, cruel ghost. Now Jeremy can sleep peacefully."

"Jeremy—can—sleep."

Slowly Adam opened his eyes. He might have come out of a strange dream. It seemed the first time that he had ever seen her in profile, looking out the window at a sky grown deeper blue, and cloudless. It was a thoughtful, musing profile, soft with relaxation. It came to him that this woman had, in three hundred hours, taken his hand and led him across three hundred bridges, through as many dark forests, each filled with a thousand fallen leaves. And one by one, she had bent with him to turn over this leaf and that, never too weary, never too bored, never too self-absorbed, to take one more step, to turn one more leaf.

"I—am indebted to you." His voice was still low, and his own choice of words surprised him. As she turned, he caught her fleeting smile, but her reply was deliberate.

"We have not finished, Adam."

"No. There's Pat. God knows she won't be getting any bargain if she takes me back. There's so much she just doesn't understand. It scares me."

"But she wants to understand. That's a big step." She met the question in his eyes, and said: "Pat telephoned me last night. She was a little incoherent, but I gathered she had come

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back, only to find you gone. She did say she would have you back on any terms. Perhaps she won't find the terms so terrible."

After a long moment Adam said huskily: "You will help me, won't you? This is the biggest thing in my life, and I don't want to muffle it. You'll stick with me, won't you?"

"Yes, for a little while longer. Then I must push you over the edge of the nest and let you try your wings." Now her voice took on its familiar brusqueness. "We have a good deal to talk about on Wednesday, Adam. Be here on time, please."

"I'll be two days early, unless you unlock the door and let me out."

"The door is not locked."

For a moment the fatigue in his eyes was shot through with humor.

"I might have known."

He got to his feet, crossed in an unsteady line to the door, and glanced back at her.

"I am tired," he said. "My legs are all weary. Of course, we came through a pretty big forest this time, didn't we?"

"A very big forest indeed, Adam."

He closed Dr. Kiraly's door behind him. Once before, he had ignored the elevator and had gone rocketing down the endless steps, chased by fifteen years of terror. Today he went just as quickly, despite the weakness in his limbs, the feeling of hunger in his chest. For today he knew what waited for him when he would reach the street, take the bus, turn the corner. That final reassurance would fulfill the hunger and stem the weariness.

Outdoors, the bitter sting of winter had softened to a hint of spring. Eyes wide, he saw the street for the first time. Children playing at the curb, city trees with tight, bumpy buds.

A new season. A chance to start over, free.

Who had said that? Dr. Kiraly? Mrs. Bussie? Buff? Pat? He heard all their voices, clear as chimes in his ears, as he had never heard them before.

He ran to catch his bus, to hurry home.



A NOTE ON THE TYPE

The text of this book was set on the Linotype in a face called Baskerville, named for John Baskerville (1706-75), of Birmingham, England, who was a writing master with a special renown for cutting inscriptions in stone. About 1750 he began experimenting with punch-cutting and making typographical material, which led, in 1757, to the publication of his first work, a Virgil in royal quarto, with great primer letters, in which the types throughout had been designed by him. This was followed by his famous editions of Milton, the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and several Latin classic authors. His types foreshadowed what we know today as the "modern" group of type faces, and these and his printing became greatly admired. After his death Baskerville's widow sold all his punches and matrices to the SOCIÉTÉ PHILOSOPHIQUE, LITTÉRAIRE ET TYPOGRAPHIQUE (totally embodied in the person of Beaumarchais, author of THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO and THE BARBER OF SEVILLE), which used some of the types to print the seventy volume edition, at Kehl, of Voltaire's works. After a checkered career on the Continent, where they dropped out of sight for some years, the punches and matrices finally came into the possession of the distinguished Paris type-founders, Deberny & Peignot, who, in singularly generous fashion, returned them to the Cambridge University Press in 1953.

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